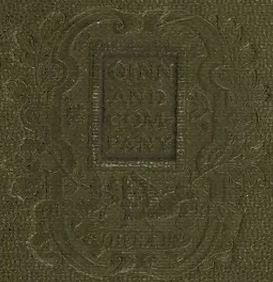

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TYPES OF MODERN DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

AN ANTHOLOGY OF ONE-ACT PLAYS
FOR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

SELECTED AND EDITED BY

LEROY PHILLIPS AND THEODORE JOHNSON

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON

THE ONE-ACT PLAY

BY

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PREFACE

As Professor Baker points out in the essay which introduces this volume, there is a significant appreciation of recent plays in the educational system of today; the modern drama is becoming a most efficient aid in the newer methods of teaching English. Accordingly, representative examples of current pieces designed for the theater are sought for reading and study in schools. The play in one act is the normal starting point in the classroom. This form is tight and brief. It grips the pupils' interest, while the analysis of a long drama, although a work of the greatest possible merit, would be forced and premature.

One group of teachers of English dramatic literature contends that the one-act play is a form, definite and new; that the conventional long play has to the short play the same relation that the novel has to the short story; that the two compressed forms are, with their varying technique, direct products of the realistic impulse of the period. Other commentators cite "Everyman," of the fifteenth century, as the preëminent one-act play. They mention other early examples and maintain that the short, crisp practice in play-writing in the twentieth century is a revival.

For the purposes of this book it is unimportant whether contemporary dramatists are creating a new art form or are, unconsciously, reverting to the method of an earlier period. What really matters here is that the one-act plays of today are yielding a surprising amount of good material, which English-literature courses cannot afford to be without.

The twenty examples assembled in this book speak for themselves. The selection has been governed by the author's integrity as an artist and skill in dramatic craftsmanship and by the fitness of the plays for the classroom.

None of this work for the stage, excepting possibly Miss Glaspell's grim and poignant "Trifles," is available in a similar anthology, and fully one half of the specimens are new and hitherto unpublished.

In types of theatrical expression and diversity of style and mood the group shows the widest possible range. A costume play, a radio play (designed for unseen audiences), a morality play, a Nativity play of great poetic beauty, and an expressionistic drama illustrate how varied the aspects of dramatic composition have become. Here also are subtle irony, tragedy, travesty, fantasy, melodrama, allegory, comedy, and pure farce.

The larger portion of the collection shows the efforts of American authors. Six plays are by writers of British birth, while a single example is from a Continental dramatist.

Brief biographical and critical notes accompany the separate plays. Suggestions for studying the one-act play, together with questions on the individual plays in this collection, appear at the end of the volume.

The production rights of the plays included in "Types of Modern Dramatic Composition" are reserved by the authors or their representatives. This does not prevent their being read in classroom or their production before school assemblies where no admission is charged. Where a public performance is given or an admission is charged, individual arrangements must be made in each instance. Productions of these plays when given by pupils for entertainments and in school activities outside of classwork and school assemblies are classed as public performances. The author's representatives authorized to license public performances by amateurs are indicated in a note accompanying each play.

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THE ONE-ACT PLAY

The one-act play, in the last fifty years, has undergone great changes. It has developed from the curtain-raiser and the after-piece, written almost entirely as a time-filler or to give an actor or actress special opportunity, to the dignity of an accepted dramatic form doing very varied work and widely acceptable for amateur performances of the best sort.

As far as England is concerned, the one-act play came into prominence in the eighteenth century as one of the elements in the long and varied bills of that day. Often it was given to a pit which must be kept interested until the seats taken for the orchestra had been filled and the curtain could rise. Or it was an after-piece to fill out the evening and end it amusingly enough to send everyone home contented. This does not mean that curtain-raisers and after-pieces did not frequently contain parts in which some actor began to make a reputation or helped to maintain an established reputation. They were, however, for the most part too insufficient in artistic worth to hold their own in the passage of time. By fifty years ago, with the gradual disappearance of the long bill and the shrinkage of the hours the public were willing to spend in the theater, the after-piece had practically disappeared. The curtain-raiser remained to serve a number of purposes. It is not difficult to recall, up to some twenty-five years ago, theaters in London and elsewhere in which it was the custom to play the main part of the audience into the theater with some curtain-raiser, good, bad, or indifferent. Very rarely, if ever, did the star of the occasion appear in this preliminary dramatic offering. It kept the pit from getting restless; it gave the less experienced and younger members of the company a chance to prove their quality; and it was a means by which ambitious would-be dramatists, not yet able to grapple successfully with the long play, were

able to exhibit something of their powers. The exact value to Henry Arthur Jones and Sir Arthur Wing Pinero of their early training in one-act plays has not yet been properly estimated. *The Clerical Error* and *Chesterton* certainly gave Henry Arthur Jones his first sense that the public would accept him as a dramatist; and *Daisy's Escape* and *By-gones* by Sir Arthur gave him a chance to show not only his equipment as an actor but something of his qualities as a playwright. Always, probably, writing the one-act has been a kind of stepping-stone to writing the longer play. Always, too, the one-act had a considerable market as a play for amateurs. Examine the best of them at any period, searching the files of the leading play publishers, and you will see that the steady market for them was not in the professional theater but in the amateur dramatic clubs of the time, many one-act plays being written especially for this group. To this same group there drifted steadily the one-act plays which had outworn their welcome on the professional stage. Long after the one-act farces of Madison Morton, such as *Box and Cox*, *Poor Pillicoddy*, and *Betsy Baker*, had lost value for the professional stage, they were given all over the English-speaking world by amateurs.

About the beginning of the present century it looked, however, as if the one-act play was doomed. With the disuse of the long bills in the professional theater, it had not only disappeared as an after-piece, but it was given more and more infrequently as a curtain-raiser. It seemed as if, shortly, it would be used only very infrequently by professionals who found in one of these plays a particularly attractive rôle, or that it would become solely the property of the amateur. When the late Rosina Vokes and her company were touring this country in a bill of one-act plays, notably *The Pantomime Rehearsal*, they undoubtedly made a great success, but it was for the personality and special abilities of Rosina Vokes the audiences attended, not because they liked the one-act play. When, shortly after, Felix Morris, graduating from that same company, attempted to play a varied and contrasting bill of one-acts, he found that he could not depend on any interest in our public for the possibilities of the one-act in dramatic form, even with his good

acting. They would attend an evening of riotous amusement in three one-acts by Miss Vokes; they would not attend when a skilled actor was exhibiting his powers in three contrasting one-acts, at least two of them serious. The judgment of Mr. Morris was that the public of his time disliked the readjustment required when, with each rise of the curtain, a new subject was opened up and the audience must adjust itself to a new play, a new place, and a different time. At the beginning of the present century, then, it looked as if the one-act play might almost disappear. Amateur clubs, becoming more and more ambitious, seemed to prefer to give the long play and to find this more satisfactory, not only to themselves but to their audiences, than any bill of one-acts.

Moreover, the rewards to the author were very slight as compared with the rewards from a long play. In most cases the one-act was sold outright to the publisher, particularly if it had not appeared first on the professional stage. Writers thought of the one-act play, then, as an initiation into playwriting,—indeed, in almost all respects as something leading up to the long play,—not as a dramatic form which was to be studied as such or which could have any large public of its own.

Two changes which mark the first decade of the present century made possible great changes in the one-act play. First and most important, because widespread and equally true for England and the United States, is the differentiation which took place in the amateur world between dramatic clubs of the older form and experimental theaters so-called. These latter groups approached their producing and acting in totally different fashion. Their leaders, eager to inform themselves as to the newest and the best in the drama, not simply in English but of the world at large, so far as it could be reached in translation, turned to giving, not recent or past successes of the professional stage, but plays not likely to be seen on the professional stage. Naturally, they came to be much interested in plays of Englishmen or of Americans which, for one reason or another,—their daring or bizarre quality, their unusualness, or even their brevity,—had no chance, for the moment, on the pro-

fessional stage. Little by little these experimental theaters, such as the Abbey Theatre at Dublin in its early days, the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, and the experimental theaters rapidly springing up in this country in the years just before the World War, provided just the conditions to put new life into the one-act play, and to give its authors a chance to do whatever they wished and could accomplish in it. In a sense, the one-act play has been the foundation of the success in some of these theaters. The Glasgow Repertory Theatre produces very little except one-act plays, so far as original work given by it is concerned. To recall the history of the Dublin theater as it was establishing itself a notable rival of professional groups, is to remember the one-act masterpieces of Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge. That is, a need for new plays created a market, and a market very different from that which has already been described.

A second force tended to supply the demand as far as the United States was concerned. It was in the first decade of the present century that there appeared in the colleges, first at Harvard University and then rapidly elsewhere, courses in playwriting. These followed hard upon an increasing list of college courses in the history of the drama of all nations, for students of plays soon became desirous to write plays of their own. Teachers of dramatic technique soon discovered how valuable is the one-act form in teaching embryo playwrights fundamentals of good playwriting, such as the relation of exposition to dramatic action, means of characterization, qualities of good dialogue, and something of the laws of suspense and climax. Quickly it became clear that it was no difficult task to teach people with any special ability to write good one-act plays, and that such writing laid a good foundation for later successful work in long plays, though it was by no means inevitable that a person writing first-rate one-act plays could promptly turn to writing successful long plays. Soon there appeared all over the country young men and women able to write one-act plays of high merit. These found a ready market with the "Little Theaters" which, just before the World War, were in this country some eight hundred in number.

A contemporaneous force aiding the new writers of one-act plays

was the changing of the interest in college and school organizations from playing professional pieces to playing work written in the playwriting course of the particular college, or to original work whatever its source.

As a natural corollary of this new demand and this new supply, a regular scheme of royalties and of collecting these royalties was established. This, of course, was the last and necessary step. Given a demand, given instruction tending to provide a reply to this demand, given a means of definite income from successful one-acts, and the circle of success was complete. Even at the rate of $5 a performance when no admission is asked, and $10 when any admission is paid, popular one-act plays written in the last fifteen years have frequently paid their authors an income of from $1000 to $1500 a year, a sum, of course, not at all comparable to the income from a successful long play on the professional stage, but still by no means to be despised. What has in the last years particularly helped the one-act play has been the stimulation to writing it given by many local, state, or national competitions with definite promise of adequate production by some Little Theater group. Also the desire of these same groups to present work as varied and as original as possible has done much to stimulate prospective writers of the one-act play to experimentation in material and fearless expression of their own individualities in the work. Another condition leading to more satisfaction in writing one-act plays has been the rapid growth in the publishing of collections of one-act plays. This has meant not only making the work of some playwright of the one-act more successful, but it has added to his income through flat payments for the use of his work or royalties accruing from the printing of his play in the collection.

It is certainly worth noting that, while it is not true that all the newer names in the English drama of the last twenty-five years have moved from the one-act play to the longer form, many of them have, as in the case of Lady Gregory, Yeats, and Synge already mentioned, Brighouse, Stanley Houghton, and in this country, in particular, O'Neill. It may be said that now there is possible such

a definite progression for the new playwright, because of the popularity of the one-act play, not in the world of the professional theater but in the increasingly competent amateur world. Beginning by himself or as a member of a course in playwriting, he tests himself on a popular form, the one-act. He learns a great deal of his technique in it. He discovers much of his own special ability as a dramatic writer in this form. He has a form in which he can treat a great variety of subjects in a great variety of ways. He is fairly sure of a large public if his work is well done. He is fairly sure of a sufficient reward to make it not only possible but desirable for him to write the one-act play. Thus his own ambitions and the ambitions of many of the amateur experimental groups coincide. In both cases there is a push toward work by the same young dramatist in the longer forms.

Today the one-act play, because it has gained in range, in choice of subject, and in the quality of its work, has taken on a dignity and significance which it did not before possess. It has come to be recognized as a dramatic form of real significance, with a technique that in part it shares with any dramatic composition, whatever its length, and in part is distinctly its own. Though it is true, in many cases, that a first-rate one-act play is a longer play wasted, this is not always true. In some cases, the one-act is the perfect form for what it contains. To expand the treatment would be to bring diffusion and consequent weakness. Of course, the good one-act play should begin not far from its climax and should deal with characters static rather than in process of development, for the time difficulty, so troublesome to every dramatist, is acutely difficult in the one-act play. In from twenty minutes to, at the longest, an hour—and that is often too long—the work must be done. Therefore change of character is well-nigh impossible. To write a good one-act play is to know how to start promptly and with emotional interest; to decide accurately just what part of the necessary expository material must be given at once and what may come out in the course of the action; to be able to discover such interesting "cover" action that even the early exposition grips attention at once; to know how to

move swiftly to the climactic scene; how to get from that all its contained drama; and, most important of all perhaps, to know how to get the curtain down quickly as soon as the climactic moment has been reached. To write the one-act play is to come to understand that a change of scene, or a dropping of the curtain for time space, spoils the unity which is one of the really indispensable qualities of a first-rate one-act play; and that to call a play broken up in this fashion a one-act is to beg the whole question whether it is not really a series of scenes and a long play in miniature.

It is not surprising in these days of the telegraph, the telephone, and a dozen other timesaving and space-surmounting inventions, to find that this compacted drama of the one-act grows steadily in popularity in the amateur world of the theater. Indeed, there must be something contributing to the popularity of the one-act play other than the causes mentioned, for, as recent collections show, interest by recent dramatists in the one-act play and the production of little masterpieces in that form mark the history of the drama of the last quarter-century, not merely in the English-speaking world but all over the Continent. The fact that it is admirable schooling for longer playwriting and that it is in a certain sense today the last word in the compacting of our playwriting from the old five-act play of Eugène Scribe and his contemporaries, through four acts to three acts, must be taken into consideration. One of its great qualities is that, brief as it is, it is very flexible and responsive. Look, for instance, at the contents of this particular volume. Here we see authors of the one-act trying experiments which bring it into relation with the motion picture and which fit it for use on the radio. Is it surprising, then, that the one-act play has risen to the dignity of special studies of it as a definite art form in playwriting? A quarter-century ago it would have seemed absurd that there should be such special and thoroughly helpful studies of it as those by Professor Lewis, Mr. Percival Wilde, and Professor Hillebrand.[1]

[1] *The Technique of the One-Act Play*, by B. Roland Lewis; *The Craftsmanship of the One-Act Play*, by Percival Wilde; *Writing the One-Act Play*, by Harold N. Hillebrand.

What results from this review of the history of the one-act play in the last fifty years is certainly interesting. Probably at no time in its history has the one-act play stood so high in the general regard of the public. Probably at no time has it been so seriously considered as a dramatic form. Yet, with all the playing of the one-act and all the publishing in regard to it, there is no likelihood that its history is nearly completed or that it will soon come to be regarded as merely a stepping-stone for the dramatist to longer play-writing or for amateur organizations toward the acting of longer plays. Always, probably, there must be something of this relation of the form to dramatists and actors; but we have only just begun to understand its right relations to the long play and to cease to think of it as a long play wasted, or a condensation of a long play. Not yet do we fully understand its possibilities, and, therefore, we cannot yet perfectly understand its technique. Many mediocre one-act plays have been written: only a few which really show what dramatists of natural versatility and acquired skill may do with the form. We are not at the crest of the wave, but in recent years the tide has been sweeping more and more rapidly to its crest. A volume like this one is an interesting illustration of what writers of different nationalities in a variety of subjects may do with the one-act play.

GEORGE PIERCE BAKER

New Haven, Connecticut

TYPES OF MODERN DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

AN ANTHOLOGY OF ONE-ACT PLAYS

THE KELLY KID[1]

BY

KATHLEEN NORRIS AND DAN TOTHEROH

The light comedy *The Kelly Kid* is a collaboration between Kathleen Norris, a brilliant and astonishingly prolific author, and Dan Totheroh, who, with an actor's trouping experience in the background, has arrived as a practical playcraftsman. Both are Californians. Short stories, signed "Kathleen Norris," began to appear in the magazines in 1910. Since then it has not been easy to follow or keep pace with her pen. On the Pacific coast Dan Totheroh was having recognition as a writer for the stage when, in the spring of 1925, though late in the season, his *Wild Birds*, a tragedy in three acts, was played for five weeks in New York City. The play immediately appeared in book form, to meet a demand from play readers, and *Wild Birds* is included in Mr. Burns Mantle's choice of ten plays which most worthily represent the season of 1924–1925.

The Kelly Kid is an adaptation by Dan Totheroh of a story of the same name which appeared in Kathleen Norris's volume *The Callahans and the Murphys*. Here is comedy at its best, in which excellent Irish character types, never caricatures, hold the stage. This collaboration admirably illustrates the frequent practice of dramatizing material first published in story form. The reverse may be possible and is sometimes successfully accomplished.

[1] Copyright, 1926, by Kathleen Norris. All rights reserved. Applications for the right of performing *The Kelly Kid* must be made to The Walter H. Baker Company, 41 Winter Street, Boston, Mass.

CHARACTERS

Mrs. Cahill
Mrs. Murphy
Mrs. Callahan
Ellen Murphy
Robbie Kelly
Officer Hamilton
Officer Burns

THE KELLY KID

SCENE: *The kitchen of the Murphy family on a hot June afternoon. It is a dark, smoke-stained kitchen with a door, back center, opening on a cluttered back porch. Beyond the porch is the back yard, with old elm trees in tender leaf. Left and right of the back door are smudged windows, with bedraggled curtains and cracked shades that are all the way up to let the sunlight in.*

A wood stove with pots and pans, a teapot, and a steaming kettle of water for the tea is left. Beyond the stove, in the corner, is the kitchen sink, in which are dirty dishes and pots. Also a few dishes on the drain board. A door below the stove opens into a closet where flour and potatoes are kept.

Under left window is a sewing-machine, with a sewing-basket and material for a summer dress. A table, down left, within reach of the stove, has tea things on it and a loaf of bread with bread knife; also a sugar bowl and a forgotten catsup bottle. Sugar is spilled on the red-checked tablecloth.

In upper right-hand corner there is a pile of old rubbage against the wall,—frayed carpets, musty clothes, shoes, hats, etc. A trap door is cut in floor, center.

The right door leads into a bedroom. Around the room are straight-backed chairs, and three chairs are drawn up to the table, one a creaky rocker.

Above the table an ironing-board is stretched across the backs of two chairs, and when the curtain rises ELLEN MURPHY *is ironing a collar and cuffs of real Irish lace. She is using an old-fashioned iron, which she heats on the stove.*

About the table, sitting in the chairs and drinking tea, are three women,—the little widow CAHILL, MRS. MURPHY, *and* MRS. CALLAHAN. MRS. CAHILL *is small and shriveled, with work-worn*

hands. Although "Jarge" Cahill died about eleven years ago, she still clings to her deep mourning. Her heavy crape face-veil is now pushed back so that she can drink her strong tea from a plain white cup. The ominous, musty folds cascade down her back. She is sitting at the end of the table close to the loaf of bread, from which she occasionally cuts herself a morsel to nibble at, like a small gray mouse.

MRS. MURPHY *has the rocker so placed that she can reach the teapot from the top of the stove; also the kettle of hot water. She is a lean little Irish woman, with a tanned freckled face, worn with years, ill-health, griefs, and worry. She wears a bedraggled black skirt, covered almost completely by a blue kitchen apron.*

MRS. CALLAHAN, *squarely built, with fine, satiny-black hair and rosy coloring, sits at the table nearest the door. She wears a shabby blue suit and a last year's hat, with faded pink roses.*

ELLEN MURPHY, *twenty years old, is a beautiful girl with wonderful pink-and-white skin and even, white teeth. Her face is now flushed from leaning over the ironing-board and from the fire in the wood stove.*

The three elderly women about the table are flushed, too, but not entirely from the heat. They are discussing a very vital subject, and they lean toward each other, their keen eyes sparkling. Just now they have all raised their teacups and have all taken a deep drink, and now they all put their cups down in their saucers and begin again.

MRS. MURPHY [*the pessimist*]. There's no good in that Kelly Kid, I've always said it!

MRS. CAHILL. [*Bitterly*] Glory be to the everlasting glory of God, but some harm will come to that child if they don't lock him up safe in jail!

MRS. MURPHY. [*Darkly*] They'll get 'um yet!

ELLEN. [*Laughing as she irons*] You're a grand lot of glooms, you perfect forty-fours! I wonder you wouldn't sit in the hot kitchen, a day like this! Why don't you go out in the back yard with grandpa and sit under the trees?

MRS. CAHILL. [*Shaking her black veils, dismally*] These are bad days out-o'-dures, wid all the flu that's in it.

MRS. MURPHY. That's right, Mrs. Cahill, dear. That's perfectly right. The fresh air's full of it.

[*The three women nod and drink their tea again, and again put down their cups all together.* ELLEN *smiles at them and hums softly as she works.*]

MRS. CAHILL. [*With a sigh and another shake of her head*] It's boys like him what grows up to fill the jails and rob the poor boxes.

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Thoughtfully. She is the level-headed member of the wrinkled trio.*] I don't know is he bad, or is he just wild and free with the bold spirits that's in him. [*She pauses, then resumes mildly.*] I seen him yesterday and I tuk it upon myself to stop him, and give 'um a word. "Robert," I says to 'um, "yure good mother that's dead would turn in her grave if she could see the way you'll be carrying-on," I says. He give me a bold, ugly look out of his bold face—[*Her voice drifts away into silence.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*With feeling*] Oh, he's a bad one! But this new cop on the beat, Hamilton, will get 'um! Ould Falley would never touch wan of thim boys, and they streelin' all over the place like Ayrabs! But this feller's a mean sort of weasel, and he'll get 'um.

MRS. CAHILL. Indeed and he will! He got Jawnny Fay last week, and Big Jawnny give 'um such a lickin', when he heard that he'd been took to the Juvenile, that Rosy Fay come runnin' over, the way she wouldn't hear the child holler.

ELLEN. [*With warmth*] Yes, and I think it was a dirty shame to arrest young Johnny! It's the Kelly Kid that's the ring leader, and he always goes scot-free. When Falley was on the beat, of course the whole pack of them knew they were safe, but this *Hamilton* is another pair of shoes—

MRS. CAHILL. I don't know where ever a *cop* would get a name like *Hamilton.*

MRS. CALLAHAN. He's none of our sort. He's a hard, mean kind of man, and God help Robbie Kelly the day he lays hands on 'um.

MRS. CAHILL. Well, Robbie has a very ugly stepmother—she's a nossy, wild sort, Daze.

[*The other women nod and sip their tea.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*Sighing*] He had a good mother.

MRS. CAHILL. Yes. And she had him in Sunday school, and she dressed him very nice, until the very Sunday she was tuk, God rest her.

MRS. CALLAHAN. Yes. And Mack Kelly wouldn't have been a bad father to 'um if he'd lived. But Daze has got that young boy of her own that's never been right since he had scarlet fever, and him teethin', and she's hard on Robbie.

[*Three women nod again.*]

MRS. MURPHY. Sister Felix says that the child has a good heart in him, but he's wild. And he'll end in jail, and I'd never raise hand nor foot to keep him out of it! [*Her mouth snaps firmly together.*]

ELLEN. [*Laughing*] Mamma's never forgiven him about the baby goat.

MRS. CALLAHAN. The baby goat—Whativer was that about?

ELLEN. Well, mamma's old Kitty had a kid here one spring, and all the Eyetalians are crazy about young goats in the spring, and Robbie Kelly drove the baby goat over to the Baldocchis' and told Gemma Baldocchi that Mrs. Murphy sent it with her compliments. Mamma went down there—and the yelling!—and the screeching!—it was Duke's mixture, all right! [*She finishes with a high laugh.*]

MRS. CAHILL. [*Shaking her head*] Can you imagine him doin' that, Mrs. Murphy, and getting you mixed up with them dirty *Eyetalians*?

MRS. MURPHY. Yes, Mrs. Cahill, dear, it was humiliatin', it was. Oh, there's no good in the boy.

ELLEN. [*Putting iron back on stove*] I'll tell you what, I don't know that it would hurt that kid to be sent up for a while. He might learn some common sense. He's got no parents, his stepmother is going to marry again, and he says he won't live with his

Aunt Lily in Troy. He'll simply go on his way until he kills someone and then it'll be jail.

MRS. MURPHY. [*Hand on teapot*] That's *just* the way it'll be! Have some more tea, Mrs. Cahill?

MRS. CAHILL. No more, thanks, Mrs. Murphy.

MRS. MURPHY. Mrs. Callahan?

MRS. CALLAHAN. No, thanks, dear.

MRS. CAHILL. You'd wonder he *wouldn't* live with his Aunt Lily; she's a fine woman.

MRS. CALLAHAN. She has a good job in the liberry, and he could set there evenings, reading a story out of a book, until she'd be going home.

MRS. CAHILL. She'd give him a good home, and she'd like to have him for company. Lily is a fine ger'rl. The Sisters had her for the Blessed Virgin wanst in their tabloos; she looked very elegant.

MRS. MURPHY. Well, wouldn't you wonder at him? I'll go to the Judge myself one of these days and tell him that if ever there was a lad that a few years on the Island would do a world's world of good, me young gallant Robbie Kelly is the lad!

ELLEN. [*Laughing*] Now, mother!—

MRS. MURPHY. [*Pugnaciously*] I *will so*! I'll tell 'um that the boy could have a good home, with a fine ger'rl that's his own mother's sister, Lily Boone, but that he's so wild he wants to run the streets, stealin' goats off of decent, respectable people that has need, God knows, of every penny!

[*The three women nod, with vigor, and sip their tea.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Glancing at clock on wall*] I ought to be going, Mrs. Murphy dear.

MRS. MURPHY. Don't be off so sudden!

MRS. CAHILL. It isn't late.

MRS. MURPHY. What's your hurry?

MRS. CALLAHAN. Poor Annie's come back from the hospital with the tiny baby. She isn't very strong and they'll be going up to visit Josie in Albany awhile. The doctor says—

MRS. CAHILL. Yes it's fine for them up there,

MRS. MURPHY. 'Twill do the baby good.

MRS. CALLAHAN. I'm thinking Annie may go tonight; she'll have a good visit with Josie and John, and may the Lord keep the little angel from heaven well and strong! [*She wipes her eyes.*]

[MRS. CAHILL *sighs deeply.* MRS. MURPHY *shakes her head.*]

MRS. CAHILL. Whatever!

MRS. MURPHY. Betune us and all har'rm, the help of God help the poor ger'rl!

[*A long, sympathetic pause as they regard each other, mournfully. The pause is broken by noise in the back yard,—voices, feet upon the porch, and then the back door is flung open and* THE KELLY KID *bursts in, a thin, dirty, tousled boy of perhaps twelve or fourteen. He is stammering and crying like a frantic little hunted animal and makes for the sewing-machine by the window, getting behind it, bracing it between him and the door.*]

KELLY KID. [*Yelling between wild sobs, his back to the startled occupants of the room*] You dirty big liar! I never done it—you dirty liar! You can kill me—you can kill me—but you won't send me to jail! I'll get a pistol, and I'll blow your brains out—and I don't care if I *do* go to the chair—I don't care if I do go to the chair—you dirty big dirty liar!—

[*The three women are on their feet.*]

MRS. CAHILL. Robbie Kelly!—

[MRS. MURPHY *runs to kitchen sink and, wetting the end of a dish-towel under the cold-water faucet, she catches hold of* THE KELLY KID *and begins wiping his dirty, tear-stained face.*]

MRS. MURPHY. Here, what's all this to-do? [*As he struggles to get away*] Here, stand still now!—What's all this, now? This is a fine way to bur'rst in upon a Christian woman! What have you been up to now, Robbie Kelly? I shouldn't wonder if the police are after you again!

KELLY KID. [*Clawing at her hands*] Oh, Mis' Murphy, don't let him get me!

MRS. MURPHY. [*Taking a last rub at his face*] Who?

KELLY KID. Hamilton's after me—the *cop's* after me and Lenny Spillane!

MRS. MURPHY. What have you been doin'?

KELLY KID. Oh, Mis' Murphy, honest to God, I never done nothin'. It was them big fellers that was foolin' with the switch, and Len and me was just lookin' at what they done—

MRS. CAHILL. [*Wailing*] My God! There's been a train wreck!

KELLY KID. No, there wasn't no wreck! But the cop says there might have been, and he says he's going to have me up before Judge Casey—and Casey told me last time, he'd send me up to Randall's Island! But I'll *kill* him first! [*He turns his eyes toward the door.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Mildly coming up to* THE KELLY KID] It's a pity you wouldn't think of that, Robbie, before now—

MRS. MURPHY. Yes! There's some that loved your good mother that thinks maybe you'd be better off for a few years, until you'd be eighteen or so, shut up where you couldn't do any harm.

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Interrupting, mildly*] Many's the time I've disputed you about it, Robbie, that you should go to your good aunt, and be a comfort to her and sell a few *Posts* like Martin does, and grow up a decent man. But no, you'd be stravagin' the neighborhood, like a wild Turk that has no God itself, and now look what's in it!

KELLY KID. I'll go to Aunt Lily—say, if you'll lend me the money for my ticket I'll go, if you'll just get me off this once! Honest I will—I know the way! If you'll get me off with the cop—

MRS. MURPHY. [*Drily*] So that you can run off wid me goats again!

KELLY KID. Mrs. Callahan, won't you *please*—won't you please,

for the love of God and the Blessed Virgin—! I'll go to my aunt and I'll help her—I'll split wood for her and run her errands—you'll not be sorry—*honest*—I promise you if I never promised anything in my life—

ELLEN. [*Who has stood the ironing-board up against the back wall, out of the way*] For Heaven's sake, Robbie Kelly, why on earth didn't you think of this before? You could have gone to your aunt when your mother died, and entered school there, and tried to make something of yourself. And now you come in with your promises and everything, when the cop's after you, and he's a new cop—nobody likes him, and his hand is against *everybody*!

MRS. CAHILL. [*Moving up above table*] You got the Fay boy into trouble, and that was the very first time, and you've been up twice before Judge Casey, and you know how mad anything with the railroad makes him, because they're all down on him, anyways—

[*There is a pause as the women look at each other and shake their heads, dubiously.* THE KELLY KID *keeps his eye on the door and the windows.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Thoughtfully*] I could go with ye to the Judge, Robbie, but I think he'll send ye up—the third time. I declare if your mother wouldn't rather see you in your grave.

KELLY KID. [*Beginning to cry*] I tell you I never done it.

MRS. CAHILL. You've done enough, God knows!

KELLY KID. But I never done that! And if he takes me and sends me to jail, I'll *tell* him I never done it! He can send me to the chair—because he's a big liar, but I'll tell the Judge that if my mother had lived I'd tell her the same thing—and if I was dying I'd tell it—[*His voice dies away in sobs.*]

ELLEN. [*Taking a frail blue handkerchief from her waist and holding it out to him*] Here—use this on your nose.

[*He is about to take it, when he hears something and whirls about.*]

MRS. CAHILL. [*Who has been looking through the window*] Whisht! There's a cop in the yard!

MRS. CALLAHAN. Saints in the heavens!

MRS. CAHILL. It's Hamilton!

KELLY KID. Don't let him take me! I never done it!

ELLEN. Quick! Come with me—[*She takes the boy by the shoulder and leads him into the bedroom, closing the door.*]

MRS. MURPHY. What's she going to do with him?

MRS. CALLAHAN. I don't know. Come—let's us be sittin' natural. That's it, Mrs. Cahill! Be pourin' us some fresh tea, Mrs. Murphy.

[MRS. MURPHY *lifts up the teapot.* MRS. CALLAHAN *and* MRS. CAHILL *seat themselves at the table.* MRS. MURPHY *pours the tea into* MRS. CAHILL'S *cup as* MRS. CAHILL *holds it out to her with a trembling hand.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Calmly*] And what was that you was sayin', Mrs. Murphy?

MRS. MURPHY. I was sayin'—

[*A rap comes on the back door.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*Giving an elaborately sly wink to the other women as she sets the teapot on the table*] Now who could *that* be, Mrs. Callahan? [*She goes to the door, opening it.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*In pleased surprise*] Well, God bless us, it's Officer Hamilton. Will ye step in?

[*Enter* OFFICER HAMILTON. *He is a tall, stalwart, freshly uniformed young man with a truculent red face. He steps in, sending a quick glance around the room, and smiles at the ladies.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. Thanks, Mrs. Murphy.

MRS. MURPHY. Won't you sit down, sir?

[OFFICER HAMILTON *sits on edge of chair, twirling his cap in his hands, still looking about the room.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*Going on*] Mrs. Callahan you know, and me friend Mrs. Cahill. I misdoubt ye don't know the whole pack of us here abouts. [*Down to table*] You wouldn't have a cup of tea while you'd be talkin'? And now what is it—it isn't the Fourth of July barbecue yet awhile?

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Looking from one to the other with a slow smile*] Come now—come now—

MRS. CAHILL. [*Exchanging surprised glances with* MRS. CALLAHAN] Well—whatever is it?—All this is very strange—

MRS. MURPHY. Did ye see me ould father out in the yard that we had anointed awhile back?

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Still smiling*] Yes, I seen Mr. Florence, and lookin' extremely well and hearty, too. [*Pausing and twirling his cap*] I'm after the Kelly Kid. Where is he?

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Utterly surprised*] After—? Is it young Robbie Kelly you mean?

OFFICER HAMILTON. Him and young Spillane. It's the first time Spillane has been caught, and I let him off again. But me young friend Robbie goes up to the Judge on Monday, and I don't doubt they'll learn him to evade the law before they're done with him!

MRS. CAHILL. I wonther that you could be doin' all that, and you widout a warrant or annything whativer.

[*The three women nod, and* MRS. CAHILL *and* MRS. CALLAHAN *sip their tea with authority.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. He's here, all right. I seen him bolt into the yard. [*Rising*] Where is he?

MRS. MURPHY. I don't know why you would chase the poor child, annyway, but whativer you do, it's neither sign nor sound of 'um you'll find in my kitchen. He'd be conthrivin' to pass out of the neighborhood entirely, I should presume, and not loither about the way you'd put hands on 'um. He's a very spry young lad, if I have 'um rightly. [*She busies herself at the sink.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Crossing to her*] Come, now—Come, now! You give me your *word* he's not here, and I'll believe you.

MRS. MURPHY. [*With elaborate innocence*] Where *would* he be? Look in me little butthry—you couldn't be hiding a young cat and his kittens in there! [*She flings open door of the closet below the stove.*] Look! Nothin' but flour an' a sack of potatoes—

OFFICER HAMILTON. No, nothin' *there*, Mrs. Murphy—but—[*Turns and looks at bedroom door*] How about—

[*At that the bedroom door opens and* ELLEN *enters.*]

ELLEN. Mamma—[*Sees* OFFICER HAMILTON] Oh, how do you do, Mr. Hamilton? [*Then to ladies, looking straight into their eyes*] Mrs. Cahill, would you step in here and say good-by to *Aunt Susie,* and you too, Mrs. Callahan? [*To* OFFICER HAMILTON] Did mamma tell you me aunt is in there, quite laid up with the arthritis?

[MRS. CALLAHAN *and* MRS. CAHILL, *her musty veils pulled down over her face, hesitate for just a moment; then pass quickly into the bedroom.*]

ELLEN. [*Still standing guard at door and calling into room*] Here's Mrs. Callahan and Mrs. Cahill come to say good-by to you, Aunt Susie! [*Back to* OFFICER HAMILTON] I guess you'll want to look in there?

OFFICER HAMILTON. Yes, I would, Miss Murphy.

ELLEN. [*Sympathetically*] These boys in the neighborhood, they're an awful care to you, I daresay.

OFFICER HAMILTON. You *know* they are, Miss Murphy—[*Steps toward her.*]

ELLEN. [*Putting out her hand*] Just a moment. I'll let you go in there, don't worry—but me Aunt Susie has something very important to say to Mrs. Cahill. Just a moment—

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Sternly*] Now, Miss Murphy!

ELLEN. [*Smiling prettily at him, using all her wiles*] *You* wouldn't ever think, now, Mr. Hamilton, that *I* would try to keep you from doing your duty?

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Taken off his feet*] Well—Well—[*He backs away.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*In bedroom*] Good-by. [*She appears in door.*] I'll be stepping on along home, Mrs. Murphy—for it's small use a house has for company, with the *police* in it! Your aunt looks better, and I don't doubt she'll be up amongst us, and herself again, in a day or two, and God grant it!

MRS. CAHILL. [*In bedroom*] And *I'll* go along wid Mrs. Callahan, Susan. [*Pause.*] Faith, and I left me bag on the bed—Wait a minute, Mrs. Callahan, dear.

MRS. CALLAHAN. All right, Mrs. Cahill.

[*Another pause.* ELLEN *moves over to her mother and stands beside her, reaching down for her hand.* MRS. MURPHY *looks up at her quickly; then looks down.* MRS. CALLAHAN *glares at* OFFICER HAMILTON, *who studies each one. Then* MRS. CAHILL *comes out, veils down, and puts her arm in* MRS. CALLAHAN'S. MRS. CALLAHAN *closes the bedroom door.* ELLEN *grips her mother's hand.*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Sweeping out the back door with* MRS. CAHILL, *who seems to be a little smaller, and walks quicker*] Good-by, Mrs. Murphy—Good-by, Ellen—

MRS. MURPHY. Good-by, dear. [*Shouting after them*] Stop in whin you're passin'.

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*In the yard*] Thank ye kindly, Mrs. Murphy.

[*Another pause as* MRS. MURPHY *looks straight ahead and* ELLEN *looks at* OFFICER HAMILTON, *head high and pert, and* HAMILTON *looks at her.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*At last*] Now, sir—you've looked into me butthry and seen me flour an' me potatoes, and you've druv me friends off of me house, and what *else* can I do for ye?

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Still watching* ELLEN, *shrewdly*] Did you know that I delayed on my way here to ask Officer Burns to keep an eye on your windows, Miss Murphy?

ELLEN. [*Flushing*] Well, I don't know why you'd do that, Mr. Hamilton!

OFFICER HAMILTON. So that nobody could help anybody else out of one of them, for instance.

ELLEN. [*Stoutly*] There's nobody in that room there but my Aunt Susan, sick in bed. I don't know what you're driving at!

MRS. MURPHY. [*Shrilly*] And if you arrest that child—and you with neither warrant not writ—a child that's got no mother, and

whatever has he done but just a few thricks that would make a decent man laugh at 'um, let alone arrest 'um!

OFFICER HAMILTON. It's my business to see that the law is respected! If he's not here, I'm sure I'm sorry that I broke up your tea party. [*Stepping toward bedroom door*] And if you'll let me give one look at—that—sick—aunt—of yours—[*Straight at* ELLEN] then I'll thank you and take my leave! [*Hand on door knob.*]

ELLEN. Saving your presence, my aunt's not young, and she's sick in bed—

OFFICER HAMILTON. I won't disturb her—

MRS. MURPHY. [*Whispering through stiff lips*] It's no use, Ellen.

ELLEN. Shhh! [*Grips her mother's arm, as* OFFICER HAMILTON *quickly opens the bedroom door.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*In a gasp*] Run, Robbie—run for your life!

ELLEN. [*Clapping her hand over her mother's mouth*] Shhh! [*A pause as* OFFICER HAMILTON *searches the room.* ELLEN *and* MRS. MURPHY *do not move.*]

[*Reënter* OFFICER HAMILTON, *looking puzzled. He closes the door gently behind him.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. I didn't disturb your aunt. She seemed to be sleeping. [*He shoots another glance at* ELLEN; *then steps up to back door and blows his whistle.* MRS. MURPHY *starts perceptibly and trembles.*]

[*In a moment* OFFICER BURNS, *young and dark, enters through the back yard.*]

OFFICER BURNS. Did you find him?

OFFICER HAMILTON. No, but he's here, somewhere, Burns.

ELLEN. [*Turning a killing glance on young* OFFICER BURNS] If you weren't the best dancer ever, Frank, I'd have you both arrested for breaking into mamma's house and scaring the wits out of us all.

OFFICER BURNS. [*Blushing*] Well, here's the thing, Miss Ellen. The boy's been making trouble for everybody. It'll be for his own good that he's shut up awhile; it'll teach him a lesson!

ELLEN. Teach him all the lessons you want to, Frank, although I'll bet *you* weren't any Child Ignatius yourself, if I remember rightly, when you were his age.

OFFICER BURNS. [*Helpless*] No, but—

ELLEN. Then don't waste time running around annoying people worse than a *hundred* Kelly Kids could annoy them.

MRS. MURPHY. [*In a high wail*] And him a posthumious child that never seen hide nor hair of his own father, that died on him before he was born!

OFFICER BURNS. Do you know what he did? Monkeying with the railway switch. It's manslaughter!—

ELLEN. [*Giving him a most disquieting glance*] But don't you have to have warrants, and search-warrants and all that sort of thing, to do this, Frank?

OFFICER BURNS. [*All confused and dismayed*] Well—but—but isn't it—isn't it better to have him in a *corrective institution* for a few years, instead of in jail for life?

ELLEN. [*Smiling alluringly at him*] Ah, but there's no *real* harm in a child like that.

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Who has been prowling about*] Cellar? [*He taps with his foot on the trapdoor.*]

MRS. MURPHY. There is not! It's the bathtub with some onions and turnips and a can of kerosene in it. Look for yourself!

[OFFICER HAMILTON *lifts up trap; then drops it again, sheepishly.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Assuming a firm, harsh attitude*] Well, now, *where* is he? He run in here—we *both* seen that. You can't hide him forever; it can't be done. I'll nab him the minute I lay eyes on him, and it'll only go the worse for him if I have to tell the court that he run off on me. Resisting the law—

ELLEN. [*Smartly*] A kid runnin' away from a cop isn't resistin' the law. I'll bet you used to run from them yourself, and think

nothing at all about it! The child didn't do anything. He said himself that he and the Spillane boy—

OFFICER HAMILTON. Aha! He *was* in here then!

ELLEN. [*Flushing, but looking at him squarely*] Well, what if he was? He run off again. He just ran by, through the yard, and through the back gate out onto the hill.

MRS. MURPHY. [*Jumping in*] Yes! There's a pat' goes down past Harrison's place, that you'd be takin' and you steppin' to the market.

OFFICER BURNS. He did not. I never took me eyes off the house.

MRS. MURPHY. Well, wouldn't you think we was all the one for lies and inthrigues! That's the police for it! They'll find you a murther as aisy as you'd pick up a button you'd dhropped on the flure. "Cap him into jail," says they, "and we'll find means and ways to keep 'um there!" There was a feller back in the ould country, and him a dacint, God-fearin' lad that had a cousin at Maynooth itself, and the good mother he had on him—

OFFICER BURNS. [*Coaxingly*] Come on, where is he, Miss Ellen?

ELLEN. [*Briskly*] Do you think, if I knew where he was, which I don't, that I'd let you haul out that poor little fellow, and keep him in the Juvenile Detention two days—among thieves and God knows what, and then have him up before Casey, to ruin his life on him? Shame on you! You and Mr. Hamilton are in a fine business chasing a child around the block, with the speeders right here on South street killing nuns and Eyetalian babies and dear knows what all! [*Her eyes are blazing.*]

OFFICER BURNS. [*With admiration*] God help your husband, Ellen, when you get going!

ELLEN. Well, I hope he will! [*Turning her back on the two officers and going to the bedroom door*] If you've both looked your fill of my aunt's room, I hope you'll excuse my shutting the door, she's trying to get some sleep! [*She closes the door gently, after looking in.*]

OFFICER HAMILTON. This'll all be told to the Judge—

MRS. MURPHY. [*Busy at sink*] You'll tell him more than your *prayers*, I don't doubt that!

ELLEN. [*Making for the back door, up to* OFFICER HAMILTON] And now, if you don't mind, I'll go bring my grandfather in from the back yard. Of course, if you're thinking to stay to supper, without an invite—

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Looking at pile of old clothes in corner*] Wait a minute! What's under those old carpets?

ELLEN. [*Standing before it, eyes blazing*] It's just nothing but rubbish!

MRS. MURPHY. [*Turning from sink*] It's been there this fortnight, until I could sort it all out for the Sisters' Rummidge Sale they're going to have. Sure you couldn't hide a Galway pig there—

ELLEN. Just kindly take *my* word for it.

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Taking broom from corner*] I'm sorry I can't! [*He begins to rifle the heap, throwing things all about.*]

ELLEN. [*Stepping aside*] Oh! Look what you're doing!

MRS. MURPHY. Now I'll have to sweep the floor!

OFFICER HAMILTON. No, there's nothing there! *You* don't see anything there, do you, Burns?

OFFICER BURNS. [*Smiling*] I do *not*, Hamilton.

ELLEN. [*Her cheeks blazing scarlet as she steps up to* OFFICER HAMILTON] We've had enough of this nonsense! Probably the Kelly Kid has made Brooklyn by this time; I hope he has! He's got cousins there, and there's plenty of people he knows! If you'll be so kind as to vacate the premises, I'll get my grandfather's milk toast ready for him!—

OFFICER HAMILTON. [*Saluting*] All right, Miss Murphy. *You* win. Come on, Burns. I don't know how she did it, but she did! [*In back door*] Good-by, Miss Murphy. Good-by, Mrs. Murphy.

MRS. MURPHY. Is it gettin' rid of ye at last we are?

OFFICER HAMILTON. It *is*, Mrs. Murphy.

[*He exits, followed by* BURNS, *who grins at* ELLEN.]

[ELLEN *and* MRS. MURPHY *watch through the windows until they pass from sight, and then* ELLEN *collapses in a chair.*]

ELLEN. Phew!

MRS. MURPHY. Whativer—whativer happened to him, Ellen?

ELLEN. [*Beginning to laugh*] Who?

MRS. MURPHY. Why, Robbie Kelly! Whativer did you do with him? Is it a magician you are?—And who's Aunt Susie?

ELLEN. [*Still laughing*] Don't you know your own relatives? Wait a minute! [*She jumps up and runs to window and looks carefully out to make sure that the officers have really gone. Then she runs to bedroom door. She opens it and peeks in. She laughs again. She whistles softly.*] It's all right. He's gone!

MRS. MURPHY. Whoiver? [*She waits, breathlessly.*]

[*Enter* MRS. CAHILL, *dressed in a sodden but brilliantly flowered kimono that hangs about her tiny, shriveled form in wild folds.*]

MRS. CAHILL. He's gone, has he?

MRS. MURPHY. [*Mouth hanging open*] Mrs. Cahill!—Why—why—*you* wint out that door with Mrs. Callahan!

MRS. CAHILL. I did not! That was the Kelly Kid.

MRS. MURPHY. The Kelly Kid?—In *your* widder's weeds?

MRS. CAHILL. Yes. [*Tottering toward table*] Pour me a cup of tea, Mrs. Murphy, dear, will you? I'm faint. [*She sits in chair.*] I never laid so still in me life as whin he come in to look at me. It was like I was laid out in me shroud—[*She looks down at the flowered kimono, shaking her head.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*Pouring tea*] Ellen Murphy, I'm proud of you! Here, Mrs. Cahill, drink this. It's good an' strong and you deserve it.

ELLEN. I just took a chance and it worked.

MRS. MURPHY. Now that I think about it, there was somethin' strange about his walk an' his figger—[*She pours tea for herself.*]

ELLEN. I thought I'd die when he started out on Mrs. Callahan's arm. He walked so fast I thought he'd trip.

MRS. CAHILL. My heart was in my mhouth whin he left the bedroom.

[MRS. CALLAHAN *is seen through window, walking fast, a bundle under her arm. She bursts into the room.*]

MRS. MURPHY. Mrs. Callahan!

ELLEN. Oh, Mrs. Callahan, is it all right?

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Panting for breath*] Yes, dear, it's all right. [*She falls into a chair, her big bosom heaving.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*To* MRS. CALLAHAN] Have some tea, dear. You're worn out!

MRS. CALLAHAN. Thanks, Mrs. Murphy.

ELLEN. Did he get off with Annie?

MRS. CALLAHAN. As easy as kiss your hand. He had Mart's old overcoat onto him, and they walked out of the house as quiet as birds. He'll stay at Josie's tonight and go to his aunt tomorrow, and nobody the wiser—[*Taking tea from* MRS. MURPHY] Thank you, dear. [*Taking sugar and stirring*] The poor child! He kissed me good-by as soleum as a priest. I wouldn't wonder would he be a bishop yet! [*She drinks.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*Drinking her own tea*] What a day!

ELLEN. When Hamilton asked what was under the carpets!—[*She laughs.*]

MRS. MURPHY. Saints in Heaven, the dirty look you give him, Ellen! When you let out that you'd seen the kid!

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Laughing*] He—he looked—Oh, the dear Lord preserve us! Whin Hamilton gives me a good clear look, as we wint out, me heart died on me!

MRS. CAHILL. Mine died on me in the bed there!

MRS. CALLAHAN. And whin Robbie Kelly walked with me into me kitchen, dressed for all the world like a widow that's lost her husband—Well, I thought Annie Curley would drop dead where she stud!

MRS. CAHILL. [*Proudly*] I stipt into the bedroom and I joomped out of me old dress and t'rew the veil over his head, "Off

wit' you!" I says. Wid that, Mrs. Callahan begun to talk to 'um. "Mrs. Cahill," she says, "will you l'ave me have a tasteen of your buttermilk the night?" she says. [*Sputtering*] Oh, dear Lord, preserve and defind us by the glory and goodness of God—out they walked, wit'in t'ree inches of Hamilton's nose itself—Is that my clothes? [*Pointing with her teaspoon at the bundle on* MRS. CALLAHAN'S *lap*]

MRS. CALLAHAN. Yes, dear. I tried not to muss 'um.

MRS. CAHILL. I'll be puttin' 'um on. Whativer would Jarge Cahill be thinkin' if he saw me like this!

[*They all laugh, and the teacups go up in unison. They smack their lips.* ELLEN *goes up near window and stands looking out. The sun is going down. The little, cluttered kitchen is getting dark. There is a pause.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*At last, solemnly*] We'll miss the child.

MRS. CALLAHAN. [*Agreeing, with a sigh*] We will that. Never will I forget the night him and the Spillane boy tuk two old carriage lamps, and wint out onto the highway. And whin a car was coming along in the dark, wouldn't they move up to it as if they was another autymobile until they was within fifteen feet, and thin the two of them *split*, and one go each side of the poor feller that was tryin' to drive—

[*Chuckles from the three old ladies.*]

ELLEN. Yes, and the day he took Annie's baby and put Katie Oliver's kid in the coach—

MRS. CALLAHAN. Oh, the Lord be good to us, that *was* a day!

MRS. MURPHY. Bad luck to the police that'd run him out of the neighborhood.

MRS. CAHILL. I was thinkin' I might have him down for Christmas wid Rose's children.

MRS. CALLAHAN. He could run around with Martin. There's no harm to the child.

MRS. MURPHY. I'll send Lily Boone a fiver, next Christmas, and ask him down.

ELLEN. We'll get Josie and John to keep an eye on him, and see he has a good time.

MRS. CALLAHAN. That'll be grand!

[*Another pause. They all drink again. The kitchen becomes darker. They all sigh.*]

MRS. MURPHY. [*At the end of her sigh*] Oh, well, they're *always* persecutin' somebody.

CURTAIN

THE DWELLER IN THE DARKNESS[1]

A PLAY OF THE UNKNOWN

BY

REGINALD BERKELEY

As an author of neat and clever plays, Reginald Berkeley has come into secure prominence in England. Born in London in 1890, he had his early education at home; but, later, he studied at Auckland College, New Zealand. His first play, *French Leave*, produced at the Globe, London, July, 1920, met with immediate success.

The Dweller in the Darkness is a "spook" play, as the subtitle, *A Play of the Unknown*, indicates. While in every way excellent for production before visible audiences, the author is here accepting the present-day challenge to dramatists to provide material for broadcasting by radio. This example of Mr. Berkeley's work is primarily included in this collection because it is an ideal specimen of a short play designed to go "on the air" and, as such, is recommended for special study. The time and the characters are made plain in the course of the play. The dialogue itself indicates the action, and stage directions, always tiresome to audiences "listening in," are not required.

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CHARACTERS

Mrs. Vyner
Phillis Vyner
Henry
Mr. Mortimer
Mr. Vyner
Professor Urquhart

THE DWELLER IN THE DARKNESS

The scene is set in the card-room of a country house, rented furnished, where the family have gathered for a quiet game of bridge after dinner.

A Mature Feminine Contralto Voice (Mrs. Vyner's). Is it my call?

A Man's Voice, Tenor (Henry's). You dealt—so I suppose we can't very well prevent you—[*In sudden astonishment*] What the dickens—?

A Girl's Soprano Voice (Phillis's). [*Much exasperated*] The lights again! Oh, mother, why did we take this house?

The Contralto Voice. Because you and your father went mad over the view; and never gave a moment's thought to the arrangements inside.

The Girl's Voice. Well—but fancy anyone being so half-witted as to have shilling-in-the-slot meters for the electric light, in a huge place like this. One really couldn't be expected to foresee that.

A Bass Voice (Mortimer's). I expect the feller that did it had got tired of selling out his investments to pay the quarterly electric-light bill.

The Girl's Voice. Well, I hope when he was reading he enjoyed the light's suddenly vanishing in the middle of a sentence—

The Tenor Voice. —giving the additional charm of obscurity to the literature of his choice.

The Girl's Voice. Shut up, Henry.

The Contralto Voice. Phillis, it's no good turning round on Henry and Mr. Mortimer. You'd better go and put a shilling in the slot; and let us get on with the game. The servants are evidently doing nothing.

PHILLIS. Don't suppose they've discovered where the wretched things are yet. There's one on each floor—Give me a shilling, someone.

MORTIMER. Here you are.

HENRY. [*Mockingly*] Have one of mine as well—and make sure of enough light to finish the rubber.

PHILLIS. [*As she goes*] You keep any little mental efforts you're capable of for following suit and returning my leads, Henry. You'll save your shilling then, and a good bit more besides.

[*Her footsteps are heard on the parquet floor, and the door is opened and shut.*]

MRS. VYNER. She won't be a minute. I'm sorry for the interruption.

THE MEN. [*Together*] Doesn't matter a bit.

MRS. VYNER. After all, one mustn't look a gift house in the meter.

MORTIMER. I thought you took it furnished.

MRS. VYNER. Yes. But the rent's so low that it's almost a gift. The owner's a friend of my husband's. [*A little pause.*]

HENRY. [*Suddenly*] Don't, Mortimer.

MORTIMER. Don't what, old boy?

HENRY. You touched my cards, didn't you?

MORTIMER. No.

HENRY. Sorry. I thought you did. What a rum thing darkness is—Ah, the light! That's better!

MRS. VYNER. One gets fanciful in the dark. I almost thought—Well, never mind.

[*The opening and shutting of the door, and* PHILLIS'S *footsteps.*]

PHILLIS. There we are. Now, Henry, we're after their money, remember—It's your call, mother.

MRS. VYNER. [*Promptly*] No bid—I've not held a card this evening.

HENRY. Nothing like telling your partner all about your hand—One diamond.

MORTIMER. [*Dismally*] No—Why one plays this game I can't think.

PHILLIS. [*With suppressed triumph*] Two No-Trumps!

MRS. VYNER. [*Sighing*] There she is again! It's the rubber game, partner—No!

HENRY. All right. Three No-Trumps.

MORTIMER. [*Disgusted*] Oh, I say, really—Why not put them on the table and be done with it—No! I can't do anything.

PHILLIS. I'll put 'em on the table if you like. [*She does so.*] There! Put yours down, too, Henry. I'll play it from the table.

[HENRY *complies.*]

MORTIMER. They get a grand slam. They can't help it. Look! Every picture card in the pack.

MRS. VYNER. Surely I make my ace of spades.

PHILLIS. You might if you had it, mother dear.

MRS. VYNER. [*Indignantly*] What do you mean—if I had it? Of course I've got—[*Puzzled*] Well, that's very strange!

PHILLIS. It'd be very much stranger if you had it, mummy darling—seeing that Henry's just put it down with *his* hand.

MRS. VYNER. [*Incredulously*] Where?

HENRY. [*Flippantly*] 'Ere y'are mum, spot the laidy—or I should rather say in these circumstances, observe the ace-piece!

PHILLIS. Look, mummy.

MRS. VYNER. [*Crossly*] It's all very well for you children to get above yourselves; but I distinctly saw the ace of spades in my hand just before the light went out.

HENRY. [*With a sudden touch of seriousness in his tone*] Really?

PHILLIS. [*Still chaffing*] I expect there's a bogy behind your chair, mother.

MRS. VYNER. [*Suspiciously*] Phillis, have you and Henry been up to some mischievous prank—?

HENRY. [*Swiftly*] No, really Mrs. Vyner!

MORTIMER. [*Suddenly and quietly*] Henry—just count your cards, will you?

HENRY. Of course. [*Counting*] One. Two. Three—

[*They all take up the strain and it becomes a kind of chant.*]

ALL. Four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—

MORTIMER. You've got fourteen, old boy.

HENRY. Rot. [*The chant is resumed.*]

ALL. Ten—eleven—twelve—thirteen—*fourteen*!

HENRY. By George, I have though!

PHILLIS. Mummy, you dealt. Didn't you notice whether the cards ended wrong?

MRS. VYNER. Yes. They didn't. They came round to me—[*Ingratiatingly*] Henry, did you take one of my cards for a lark—when the lights were out?

HENRY. [*Quietly and absolutely convincing*] No, Mrs. Vyner. Of course I didn't.

MRS. VYNER. [*Apologetically*] Because, as a matter of fact, I felt a little tiny tug—but I thought it was imagination.

MORTIMER. [*Breezily*] So it was. Misdeal. Whose turn is it?

HENRY. Do you mind if we don't play any more?

MRS. VYNER. Not a bit. Only it leaves the rubber unfinished.

HENRY. It doesn't matter.

PHILLIS. [*Astonished*] Why, what's up, Henry?

HENRY. [*Almost defiantly*] Well, since you've begun talking about tugs—I thought I felt someone leaning over me when it was dark. Honestly. And then I thought Mortimer touched my cards. And I don't remember the ace in my hand when I first sorted it.

[*A little pause.*]

MORTIMER. [*Derisively*] Spooks, Henry, what? That's better fun than bridge.

PHILLIS. [*Protesting*] Thanks so much! We live here remember!

MORTIMER. [*Bluffly*] But my dear Miss Vyner, you don't believe rot like that, do you?

PHILLIS. [*Uneasily*] Well, I dunno—what's that?

[*The door is opened.*]

Oh, father, come in—you gave me such a fright.

[*His steps are heard.*]

MRS. VYNER. Nonsense, Phillis. How could your father give anyone a fright?

MR. VYNER. [*A mature voice, drily*] I've certainly never succeeded in doing so to you, my dear—Urquhart is here. [*Over his shoulder*] Come in, Urquhart—

[*Their steps are audible.*]

Well! Finished your game?

MRS. VYNER. We haven't finished, as a matter of fact. We've given up playing.

MR. VYNER. Tired?

PHILLIS. No. Henry felt spooky.

MR. VYNER. Felt spooky? That's curious, Urquhart, isn't it?

URQUHART. [*A thin, refined voice*] Very.

MORTIMER. Why is it curious?

MR. VYNER. [*Jauntily*] Because of the ghost.

PHILLIS. Ghost, father—what ghost? Is the house haunted?

MR. VYNER. Only by rats, I should think. But there's a legend about this room.

HENRY. This room?

MR. VYNER. This very room—it's only a legend, you know. The man who lived here in the days of the Regency is the ghost. He was caught cheating at cards. There was a dreadful scandal—

MORTIMER. [*Interrupting*] And when his friends had one by one cast him off and stalked out of the room, he shot himself in an agony of remorse, and now returns punctually every Friday night to maunder over the scene of his tragedy and expiate his offense. I know. The usual story. The house agents make 'em up in hundreds.

MR. VYNER. [*Politely*] Oh dear, no. It's nothing so simple as that. He was a very alarming customer. Immensely powerful. Over six feet high with a curious round-shouldered, stooping walk almost like a hunchback,—if you can imagine such a thing on a six-foot man. He had a very wicked reputation in the neighborhood. Used to go about armed with some horrible thing like a knuckle-duster. He'd hit out with it on the slightest provocation.

HENRY. What's that to do with cheating at cards?

MR. VYNER. I'm coming to that. He had uncanny luck at gambling, and used to give parties regularly. Here in this room. I dare say at that very table—it looks old enough.

PHILLIS. [*Sharply pushing back her chair*] Thanks awfully.

MR. VYNER. Well, it's nothing to worry about now, Phillis—One night a comparative stranger was playing—someone who didn't perhaps realize his host's reputation, and was unwise enough to query the fairness of the play. The host took one leap at him, and hit him in the face—with the knuckle-duster. You can imagine the effect. It plowed up the man's features as though they'd been peeled off—wiped out—obliterated. It killed him.

HENRY. [*Sharply*] And then he killed himself?

MR. VYNER. No. Fell down dead. Apoplectic seizure.

MORTIMER. [*Skeptically*] How do you know all this about a furnished house?

MR. VYNER. There's a book about it in the library. Picture of the man, too.

MORTIMER. I bet it was all faked up and put there by the house agents to catch romantic tenants who enjoy living with legends of that kind. What? Feller dies in a drunken brawl; and then spends the following century hovering about in a drafty card-room—

MRS. VYNER. [*A little frigidly*] Sorry you feel the draft, Mr. Mortimer.

MORTIMER. [*Heartily*] I beg your pardon. That was only thrown in as a figure of speech. But, really, one can't swallow that. I mean, a century's such a long time, isn't it? What do you think, Professor Urquhart? You're a scientist.

URQUHART. I'm only a scientist because I refuse to form opinions without facts to go upon—I don't think anything, Mr. Mortimer.

HENRY. Still it was funny tonight. Changing the cards, I mean.

MORTIMER. I tell you it was a misdeal. Wasn't it, Professor?

URQUHART. I should always accept a natural explanation in preference to the supernatural.

HENRY. [*Stubbornly*] Well, I've told you what I felt.

URQUHART. [*Interested*] Oh, you felt something then?

HENRY. I thought so. Yes. I thought someone leaned over my shoulder and touched my cards—when the lights went out.

MR. VYNER. [*Interrupting*] Lights? When did the lights go out?

PHILLIS. [*Swiftly*] Only on this floor, daddy. The wretched slot meter again.

HENRY. Well! That's what I thought, anyhow.

URQUHART. Most interesting. We could test it if you like—fairly simply.

HENRY. Test it?

URQUHART. Not, of course, whether you felt a ghost or not. But whether what the psychists call the "operating entities" are present in this room. The forces that cause manifestations.

PHILLIS. Forces. What forces?

URQUHART. Ah! I wish I knew. Some people think a sort of undetermined animal magnetism. Some think actually discarnate human beings.

MRS. VYNER. Discarnate human beings. Ghosts, in fact?

URQUHART. Well, I suppose they might be called ghosts. But very harmless and practical-minded ghosts—that juggle with tea tables, and ring bells, and in some circumstances talk through trumpets—

MORTIMER. Instead of talking through their hats—like a great many people who believe in them.

URQUHART. [*Placidly*] Quite true.

PHILLIS. You don't sound a very convinced believer in these forces, Mr. Urquhart.

URQUHART. Believer is too strong a word. I think there's a case for investigation.

HENRY. Then let's investigate.

URQUHART. By all means—if Mrs. Vyner has no objection.

MRS. VYNER. None at all. It thrills me.

PHILLIS. But how? What are we to do?

URQUHART. It's perfectly simple—provided one of you has mediumistic power.

VYNER. But how can we tell that?

URQUHART. Most people have a certain latent potentiality. We shall know by our results whether we've a real medium among us.

MORTIMER. [*Cynically*] Or a real humbug.

PHILLIS. No, Mr. Mortimer. You're not to spoil it.

MORTIMER. All right. Let's try.

URQUHART. Bring up chairs round the table. Mr. Mortimer, go between the two ladies, will you? They mustn't sit side by side.

MORTIMER. Thought it was a séance, not a tea party. All right, I'll do it.

URQUHART. We must relax our minds. No tension. Just empty them as much as possible.

PHILLIS. That fortunately doesn't take much effort in Henry's case.

URQUHART. S'sh! Don't be flippant. Mr. Mortimer may be as unconvinced as he likes; but we must none of us be flippant.

MORTIMER. I'm the soul of gravity.

URQUHART. Hands on the table. Little fingers touching—Switch off the light, someone. [*The click of the switch.*]

MORTIMER. Thought so. Only in the dark.

URQUHART. Well, but after all, that's the main reason why we know so little. The forces can't work in daylight. It deadens them.

MORTIMER. Or exposes them.

URQUHART. Perhaps—Though the spectrum contains many equally curious qualities. And it's a strange thing that from time immemorial there should have been a tradition of the Powers of darkness. [*A little pause.*] Is everyone allowing his mind to be at complete peace?—[*Another little pause. Then suddenly*] There *is* mediumistic power.

MRS. VYNER. How do you know?

URQUHART. Because of the chill on our fingers—like a cold wind. Can't you feel it?

HENRY. [*Surprised*] Yes. I can.

MORTIMER. I musn't talk about the draft again, I suppose; but there's a gale blowing under that door enough to freeze a man to—

URQUHART. [*Gently*] Quiet, Mr. Mortimer. Give it a chance.

MORTIMER. Sorry. [*A little pause.*]

PHILLIS. [*Suddenly*] No!

HENRY and URQUHART. [*Together*] What is it!

PHILLIS. [*Uneasily*] There's a cobweb on my face. [*Blowing*] Pfoo! Pfoo! It won't go away!

URQUHART. No? Leave it alone. That's one of the regular symptoms. Yes, the influence is growing. One of us is a powerful medium. [*A little pause.*]

PHILLIS. [*Suddenly*] Mother. [*No reply.*] Mother.

HENRY. She's asleep, I think.

URQUHART. Then don't disturb her, whatever you do. She must be the medium.

VYNER. [*With a shade of anxiety in his voice*] It's all right I suppose, Urquhart!

URQUHART. Perfectly— [*A little pause.*]

MORTIMER. [*Sharply*] Don't be an ass, Henry.

HENRY. What d'you mean?

MORTIMER. You tilted the table. Don't.

HENRY. I didn't tilt the table—I will though—That's curious.

PHILLIS. What's curious, Henry?

HENRY. [*Panting a little*] I can't move it. Look. I'm trying as hard as I can.

MORTIMER. How can I look in the dark?

URQUHART. [*Gently*] Yes. But please, both of you, don't interfere with the séance. We may get something really out of the way.

[*The table is heard rocking to and fro.*]

PHILLIS. What makes it rock like this?

URQUHART. Unless someone is cheating—psychic force.

MORTIMER. [*Significantly*] Unless—

URQUHART. That's what I said.

MORTIMER. [*Skeptically*] It's a remarkable thing that these things never happen except when there's a loophole to fraud.

URQUHART. Let's try to reduce the possibility of fraud, then. We'll go a step further. All take your hands off the table and join hands in a ring—Have you done that?

VOICES. Yes.

URQUHART. [*Firmly*] Is anyone there?

[*A sudden rap on the floor.*]

MORTIMER. Henry, don't play the ass!

HENRY. [*Crossly*] I'm not, you fool.

URQUHART. Hush!—If there is a message, will you rap again?

[*Silence.*]

MORTIMER. [*Irrepressibly*] Sorry you've been terroubbled!

[*A violent rap.*]

Sign please.

[*A furious crescendo.*]

URQUHART. Really, Mr. Mortimer, you are most unwise. It irritates them.

VYNER. Them?

URQUHART. The unseen. The dwellers in the dark.

HENRY. Why do you assume the plural?

URQUHART. Them—or him—if there's only one. Usually there are more than one. But Mr. Mortimer makes it very difficult.

MORTIMER. I'm sorry. Go on.

URQUHART. [*A little annoyed*] There's very little use in going on. They won't say anything now. [*A sharp rap.*] Wait, though. Perhaps we'll get something. [*Another rap.*] Does that mean a message? [*A rap.*] How are we to read it? The alphabet? [*A rap.*] Very well. From whom is the message? [*Eight raps.*] H— [*One rap.*] A— [*Eighteen raps.*] R— [*Four raps.*] D— [*A pause.*] HARD. Does that mean difficult? [*A scurry of raps.*] Oh, well, go on. [*A little pause, then five raps.*] E— [*Fourteen raps.*] N— HARDEN. Is that a name? [*A heavy rap.*] It is. Go on then. [*Two raps.*] B— [*Twenty-five raps.*] Y— [*A pause.*] HARDEN BY— [*A scurry of raps.*]

MRS. VYNER. [*In a curious unaccented voice*] No, it's not that.

URQUHART. Hush. Wait— Is it HARDENBY? [*A rap.*] What Hardenby? [*Ten raps.*] J— [*Fifteen raps.*] O— [*Eight raps.*] H— [*Fourteen raps.*] N— [*A pause.*] JOHN. JOHN HARDENBY. Is that it? [*A sharp rap.*]

VYNER. [*In an awestruck voice*] John Hardenby. But that's the name of the man who cheated at cards.

MORTIMER. [*Scornfully*] Yes. But Urquhart knew that, and so did you, and I dare say Henry and Phillis, too. It's in the book in the library.

HENRY. [*Gently*] Mortimer old boy, you oughtn't to suggest that we're spoofing. I'm not and I'm quite sure the others aren't.

MORTIMER. [*Cynically*] Well then, let's say that the habit of cheating appears to cling to Mr. Hardenby.

[*A sledge-hammer blow on the floor.*]

URQUHART. [*Gravely*] You really shouldn't say a thing like that. These manifestations are believed to materialize through the medium in the form of physical substance. There are ungovernable forces unloosed. I do beg you not to provoke the unseen.

MORTIMER. [*Snorting*] What absolute rot! I notice the manifestations take jolly good care only to show themselves under a pair of stout boots.

[*A fearful crash on the wall, and a wailing like the wind.* PHYLLIS *gives a little yelp of dismay.*]

HENRY. [*A little alarmed*] That's not under anyone's boots.

MORTIMER. That is the wind blowing down a picture.

URQUHART. Well, let's call it the wind. But do please refrain from calculated offense.

PHILLIS. Please, Mr. Mortimer. Don't be foolhardy.

MORTIMER. To please you, Miss Vyner—anything. Carry on, Professor Urquhart!

URQUHART. I'm not sure that we haven't driven them—or him—away. Noise distracts them so. We can only wait quite still for a few minutes; until there is a manifestation.

VYNER. Manifestation? Do you mean until something shows itself?

URQUHART. I don't necessarily mean a materialization. That happens only very rarely—when the dwellers in the darkness have something overmastering to achieve. There have been apparitions, of course, but we mustn't expect one tonight, after all the interruptions—unless—

MORTIMER. Well—unless what?

URQUHART. [*Gravely*] Unless they—or he—had some special purpose to serve.

MORTIMER. Such, for example, as—?

URQUHART. Such, for example, as taking away doubt, Mr. Mortimer.

A WOMAN'S VOICE. [*Apparently* MRS. VYNER'S] Or punishing folly.

VYNER. [*Sharply*] Who said that?

MORTIMER. [*Good-humoredly*] Mrs. Vyner.

PHILLIS. Are you awake, mother? Mother—Is she still asleep?

HENRY. Apparently.

PHILLIS. Then how can she speak? It didn't sound like her voice, either.

MORTIMER. It didn't sound like anyone else's—and so by elimination—

URQUHART. Quiet, Mortimer. You promised.

PHILLIS. But was it her voice, Mr. Urquhart?

URQUHART. The sounds were made by her vocal chords. But whether she was using them—

PHILLIS. [*Nervously*] Oh—you mean—

[*A little uneasy pause.*]

HENRY. [*Quietly*] Look here, I don't know what you others think, but I believe there's something in the room.

PHILLIS. Don't, Henry. That frightens me.

URQUHART. Whatever you do, control your fear. You must never let the unseen catch you afraid.

HENRY. There is something. Over there by the window, behind. Look!

MORTIMER. [*Harshly*] It's the sofa, of course.

PHILLIS. [*Choking*] It's not the sofa. It's some horrible rounded thing. It's like a hunchback. It's blocking up all the lower part of the window—I'm frightened.

URQUHART. [*Earnestly*] Miss Vyner, you mustn't. You really mustn't. You put yourself in their power if you show fear.

PHILLIS. But I can't help it. I'm afraid. It's moving. It's coming this way. It's coming at *me*!

URQUHART. [*Quietly*] Someone turn the lights up, quickly. The light is infallible in restoring control.

MORTIMER. Go on, Henry. Turn it up.

[HENRY *is heard to leave his place.*]

HENRY. [*In a strange voice*] I can't. The switch won't work.

VYNER. Won't work. I'll come.

PHILLIS. [*Suddenly in a dreadful voice*] Mr. Urquhart. There's something standing just beside me—[*With a little gasp*] Oh, God. I've touched it.

MORTIMER. [*Springing up*] Here, let me do that light—Don't play the ass any more, Henry—Get out of the way.

HENRY. [*His voice some distance off*] I'm not in the way.

MORTIMER. [*Savagely*] Then get out of the way, you, whoever you are. You in front of me. [*A note of restrained terror coming into his voice*] Get out of the way! [*Shouting*] Get out of the way. I'll lay you out if you play the fool—All right, it's your own doing. Take it then.

[*The sound of a hurried rush forward; a sudden terrible gasp. A fearful blow; a dreadful crashing fall; and a horrible groan.*]

EVERYONE. What's the matter? What's the matter?

[*A pounding noise is still audible.*]

URQUHART. [*Anxiously*] Mortimer. Are you all right?—Can't someone strike a match?

[*A horrible laugh.*]

Who's that laughing?

VYNER. [*Panting*] I'll have this in a minute—Henry, there are matches in my coat.

HENRY. [*Striking them*] Won't strike.

[*The laugh again.*]

There's a light on the landing, isn't there? I'll open the door.

[*The sound of the door thrown open.*]

Now you can see a bit—[*Horrified*] What's that crouching over Mortimer?

URQUHART. Don't be hysterical, man. There's nothing there.

[*The click of the switch.*]

VYNER. Got it.

HENRY. [*Fervently*] Thank God for the light at last—

MRS. VYNER. —I've been asleep. [*Alarmed*] What's the matter with everybody? What is it?

HENRY. My God, look at Mortimer.

URQUHART. Turn him over quick.

VYNER. —Ah!

PHILLIS. [*Screaming with terror*] He hasn't got a face—He hasn't got a face—

CURTAIN

WANDERLUST[1]

BY

KENYON NICHOLSON

Kenyon Nicholson graduated from Wabash College, which is in his native town, Crawfordsville, Indiana. He also had postgraduate work at Columbia and Cambridge (England) Universities. A first-hand knowledge of stage technique came to him through an association with Stuart Walker, the originator of the Portmanteau Theatre. Now, for several years, Mr. Nicholson has been an instructor at Columbia, offering special playwriting courses as an assistant to Professor Hatcher Hughes. His first play, *Honor Bright*, was written in collaboration with Meredith Nicholson, the novelist. Mr. Nicholson has included several of his one-act plays in *Garden Varieties*, a published volume.

Wanderlust is a rather painful picture of the cheap and tawdry in a New York flat. While the comedy element is not lacking, it is employed as a background to enhance the figure of a romantic, not uncourageous, dreamer who, when the realization of his deepest hope seems secure, accepts defeat.

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CHARACTERS

Isaac Pollant
Goldie Pollant, *his wife*
Milton Pollant, *his son*
Bernice Pollant, *his daughter*
Sidney Heim
Padraic Kerrigan

WANDERLUST

SCENE: *The living-room of the Pollant flat in the Bronx, New York. It is about seven o'clock of a late fall evening. The room is overfurnished and overcrowded with cheap furniture. The pictures are of the chromo variety: spirited horses rearing at flashes of lightning, chariot races, pastoral scenes. On a small table along the left wall is a box-Victrola. It must be noted that at the extreme right of the room, down stage, near a well-worn rocker, is a small shelf-stand, filled with books. A door, right, leads into the dining-room and kitchen. On the opposite side of the room, a door leads to the outside hall. The room is illuminated by gas. There is a wall telephone.*

[*As the curtain rises* MRS. POLLANT, *a stout woman wearing a stiff black party dress, is sitting in a rocking-chair, knitting. She is talking to her daughter, who is in the next room dressing.*]

BERNICE. [*Off stage*] Ma, do something for me?

MRS. POLLANT. What do you want now, Bernice?

BERNICE. [*Off stage*] Turn on the phonograph, will you? I want to hear that "Poppa Loves Momma" record—

MRS. POLLANT. [*Rising heavily*] You should do it yourself. You're younger than me—

BERNICE. [*Off stage*] I'm dressing!

MRS. POLLANT [*Winding machine*] By rights we oughtn't to play music in the house with Uncle Barney dead only three weeks and he our benefactor—

BERNICE. [*Off stage*] Oh, forget him!

[MRS. POLLANT *starts the song on its way as* BERNICE *enters. She is dressed in exaggerated imitation of the latest Fifth Avenue mode, and is a full-fledged product of the movie and dance palaces. She presents her back to her mother.*]

Hook me up, Ma. Gee, this dress is a fright!

MRS. POLLANT. It makes you look so bold.

BERNICE. [*Shaking her shoulders to the music*] I *am* bold. A bold bad hussy from the Bronx—!

MRS. POLLANT. Stand still!

BERNICE. Wait'll you see how I knock 'em dead up at the party tonight.

MRS. POLLANT. By rights we oughtn't go to the party so soon after your uncle Barney—may he rest in peace—was taken from us.

BERNICE. Say, Ma, what's the use of kidding each other? You know we never thought a nickel's worth of that old tightwad when he was alive. It was the surprise of our lives he left us that money—

MRS. POLLANT. Of course in one way it don't do the dead no good to mourn for them. [*Sighing*] The best you can do is keep their memories in your heart—

BERNICE. Funny about Uncle Barney. We never knew the old boy was alive till he died. Say, that's a good one—never knew he was alive till he was dead—I'll have to tell Sid that one. [*She is quite pleased with her mot.*] The worst of going to this party upstairs is they'll think we're their friends for life.

MRS. POLLANT. The Vogels are nice people, Bernice.

BERNICE. First thing you know they'll be hanging around when we move up on the Drive. I tell you what, Ma, when we get into our new flat we got to cut out all these pikers around here—

MRS. POLLANT. You shouldn't treat your old friends that way.

BERNICE. [*Turning off the Victrola*] There's something else I've been thinking—about Sid.

MRS. POLLANT. What about Sidney?

BERNICE. Well, Sid's a wonderful fella, but after all he's just a soda clerk.

MRS. POLLANT. It's a nice job—

BERNICE. I wonder does Sid expect me to marry him—now.

MRS. POLLANT. The way you two hug and kiss I'd hope so!

BERNICE. When we're up on the Drive, how can you tell who I'll meet—

MRS. POLLANT. [*Placidly*] I wouldn't let go of Sidney just yet —What's the rush?

BERNICE. [*She looks thoughtfully at the ring on the third finger of her left hand.*] I couldn't shake him very easy. I'll sure be tickled pink when we get out of here. How I hate the Bronx!

MRS. POLLANT. The movers promised for Monday. [*Looking around her*] How I dread it!

BERNICE. But won't it be wonderful—! The trouble is, this old junk'll look fierce in the new place. It'll be a dead give-away.

MRS. POLLANT. Poppa won't let us buy new things just yet.

BERNICE. Oh, he makes me sick! If you left it to him we'd stay here the rest of our lives.

MRS. POLLANT. You can't blame Poppa so much. It's not as if Uncle Barney left us a fortune. It's just enough to live comfortable in a nice flat—

BERNICE. [*Passionately*] I don't care! Poppa don't consider us one bit. All he does is read those old books of his and spend his time gabbing with that Kerrigan fella. Makes me sick! That's what it does—

[*At this point in* BERNICE'S *diatribe* ISAAC POLLANT *enters. He is a small, faded, baldish man. His clothes hang loosely on him, his eyes are faded, his skin faded. There is something quite gentle and likable about him. He rather sidles in, gives a puzzled look around, as though he had not been living in this same flat for fifteen years and were not perfectly familiar with its details. He removes his overcoat, and almost at once edges to the rocker near the bookshelves. The following dialogue proceeds while he is engaged in these operations.*]

MRS. POLLANT. Well, Isaac? You're late for supper, ain't you?

POLLANT. Not much, Goldie.

MRS. POLLANT. You want to go with us to the party upstairs at Mrs. Vogel's tonight?

POLLANT. I'm busy tonight—

MRS. POLLANT. What means busy?

POLLANT. I'm expecting Mr. Kerrigan.

BERNICE. [*Contemptuously*] Mr. Kerrigan! That kid!

POLLANT. [*Polishing his spectacles*] What's the matter with Mr. Kerrigan, hey?

BERNICE. Why, he's one of those Socialists—Makes speeches on the corner. He'll be put in jail one of these days.

POLLANT. [*With a confident smile*] Don't worry yourself about Kerrigan, Becky!

BERNICE. [*Irritably*] How many times do I have to tell you not to call me Becky. My name is Bernice.

MRS. POLLANT. Your Poppa gets absent-minded from reading so much from books.

BERNICE. [*Turning*] Let's go in and eat. Everything's ready, isn't it?

MRS. POLLANT. You go ahead. I'll wait for Milton. We ain't got much; Mrs. Vogel's got nice refreshments. You ought of seen what went up in the dumb waiter this afternoon—!

[BERNICE *starts to go into the dining-room, when the hall door opens and* MILTON, *her brother, and* SIDNEY HEIM, *her beau, come in.* MILTON *is a tall, pimply youth.* SIDNEY *is a flabby individual with a drooping lower lip which makes his mouth seem perpetually open. He seems unable to stand still: his feet are always forming "steps," like a vaudeville dancer. Both youths wear the latest in natty clothes.*]

MILTON. H'lo, folks.

MRS. POLLANT. [*To her son*] I'd think you could get home to your meals on time. [*To* MR. HEIM] How are you feeling tonight, Sidney?

SIDNEY. Not an ache or pain, Mrs. Pollant—not an ache or pain.

BERNICE. [*Petulantly*] You didn't ring me on the phone today.

SIDNEY. I know it, Bernice. I got busy—

MILTON. I'll say he's busy. Vampin' all the broads that drink soda-water. [*Elaborately*] Ladies and gentlemen: here he is! Behold the original drug-store sheik!

SIDNEY. [*With a feint at hitting* MILTON] You big bum!

MRS. POLLANT. Boys, you shouldn't fight.

[SIDNEY *collars* MILTON, *puts his hand on his hip, and simpers effeminately in a high-pitched voice.*]

SIDNEY. And this, ladies, take a look, is the Cigar Store's gentleman pet—!

MILTON. Say! How do you get that way—

BERNICE. [*Admiringly*] Sid, you're just killing when you act that way.

MILTON. [*With irony*] It's a gift.

SIDNEY. Speakin' of gifts—that reminds me. A little package from Tiffany's.

[SIDNEY *presents a flat parcel he is carrying to* BERNICE, *with a ceremonial bow.*]

MILTON. Don't get excited, Sis. It's a bum phonograph record he won in a raffle.

SIDNEY. It's a swell record—a red seal. Cost two seventy-five.

MRS. POLLANT. [*Beaming*] Now, isn't that nice?

BERNICE. [*Reading label*] "G Minor Ballade, by Chop-pin, played by Godowsky."

MILTON. Good night!

MRS. POLLANT. Put it on, and let's see what it sounds like.

[SIDNEY *takes record from* BERNICE *and puts it on the machine.*]

BERNICE. I don't think I'm going to like it.

SIDNEY. You never can tell about this high-brow stuff—

[*The music begins. They all remain silent for a moment, appraising it.*]

MILTON. You can have all of that you want—!

MRS. POLLANT. Sounds like somebody practicing—

BERNICE. I'll take it down and maybe they'll change it for one of Vincent Lopez's.

MRS. POLLANT. I think you better keep it, Bernice. It'll be nice for when we have visitors in our new apartment on the Drive.

POLLANT. [*Looking up suddenly*] Chopin—! Isn't that Chopin?

BERNICE. You can't prove it by me.

POLLANT. It's beautiful—!

BERNICE. Turn it off, Sid. Poppa can play it over when he's alone.

[SIDNEY *stops the machine.*]

MILTON. Just so I'm not around—

SIDNEY. What's the snappy story you're so interested in, Mr. Pollant?

POLLANT. It's a copy of Baedeker.

SIDNEY. [*Mystified*] Baedeker. What's that—a disease?

MRS. POLLANT. Poppa reads books about travel. All the time—

BERNICE. And the only traveling he does is in the Subway—

[*This remark causes laughter.* POLLANT *has returned to his reading.*]

MILTON. On the way up tonight I took Sid around by the Drive and showed him the place.

MRS. POLLANT. That's why you were so late getting home.

SIDNEY. Some swell joint, I'll say! Oh boy!

BERNICE. Did you look inside?

SIDNEY. We tipped the nigger hall-boy a quarter, and he took us all through.

MILTON. It makes me feel rich just to walk through that marble lobby—

BERNICE. [*To* SIDNEY] How'd you like the parlor with the windows looking out on 110th Street? You can see the River if you lean out enough. Did you show him my room, Milton?

MILTON. *Your* room! What are you calling your room?

BERNICE. The big one with the glass doors.

MILTON. And I'll be pushed into the little dark one, I suppose, where I get a fine view of ash cans!

MRS. POLLANT. Children, the rooms ain't decided yet! Now, hush!

MILTON. Well, Bernice gets everything in this family. What do you think I am—the goat?

MRS. POLLANT. We don't think no such thing.

MILTON. Well, I got some rights. And I'll tell you this—you might as well know it now—I'm leaving the store. Told the boss today.

MRS. POLLANT. [*In a panic*] Milton! You didn't!

BERNICE. You might know he'd do something foolish—

MILTON. Did you think I'd be stickin' to that job the rest of my life—!

MRS. POLLANT. [*To her husband*] Poppa! Hear that, Poppa, Milton's quitting at the store.

POLLANT. [*Looking up from his book*] What?

MRS. POLLANT. Milton—he's going to stop work.

MILTON. Well, what's the use of bein' left money if you have to work all the time?

POLLANT. [*Angrily*] But I specially told you not to give up your job—!

MRS. POLLANT. [*To her son*] Why didn't you mind Poppa?

POLLANT. How many times I told you not to give up your job. —Didn't I tell you we got to go slow till we see how much expense we have if we do move.

BERNICE. If—!

MILTON. Oh, you're so scared of starving it's a wonder you don't die of fright—I'd look swell livin' on the Drive and sellin' cigars, wouldn't I?

SIDNEY. [*Judiciously siding with the parent*] Something in what your Pop says, Milton.

MILTON. [*Contemptuously*] Say, you'd be satisfied jerkin'

sodas till you was ninety. I've got ambition. I'm goin' on the road with a line of goods—that's where the money is—

[POLLANT *has been endeavoring to inject himself into the conversation for the last few speeches.*]

POLLANT. I tell you you shouldn't give up your job till—

MILTON. Just because you been a stick-in-the-mud for twenty years is no reason I should be, is it?

BERNICE. Milton's right. If it wasn't that Uncle Barney died and left us this money we'd have to stay here the rest of our lives—

POLLANT. [*Shrilly*] What's the matter with this place I'd like to know? What? It was good enough for Momma and me for twenty years, eh? What's your Riverside Drive? Eh? Who lives there? A lot of—a lot of low lifes!

MRS. POLLANT. Poppa, you shouldn't say such things!

MILTON. Let him rave—

POLLANT. There's better things to do with that money—than to move to the Drive—Finer things—!

[*The doorbell rings.*]

MRS. POLLANT. See who wants us, Bernice.

POLLANT. [*Rising*] That is Kerry, maybe.

MRS. POLLANT. You'd think he'd wait till after supper—

[BERNICE *opens the door, admitting* PADRIAC KERRIGAN. *He is about twenty-five: a short, squat youth, with fine blue eyes and a lot of tangled black hair. His habitual expression is quite serious, but his eyes are full of humor.*]

KERRIGAN. Good evening.

[POLLANT *gives an exclamation of pleasure, and crosses to shake hands with his friend. The rest of the family scarcely greet him.*]

POLLANT. [*Leading the way to his chair*] Come right here, Kerry—sit right here—

KERRIGAN. Fine night to be out. Stars, moon, and the air so sharp it makes your blood feel on fire.

MRS. POLLANT. [*Suspiciously*] Yes?

MILTON. Say, ain't it time to eat—?

MRS. POLLANT. [*Bustling up*] Yes, children. Go to the dining-room. No quarreling—

SIDNEY. I'm so hungry I can eat a house and lot—My arm?

[*He elaborately offers his arm to* BERNICE, *and the two go into the dining-room, followed by* MILTON.]

MRS. POLLANT. Poppa, come eat something.

POLLANT. I don't want to eat now. Maybe—later.

MRS. POLLANT. What's the matter with you, Poppa? Maybe you'd like a little something, Mr. Kerrigan. We just got delicatessen—

KERRIGAN. No, thanks, Mrs. Pollant. I ate at the corner before I came up.

MRS. POLLANT. Well, you two—I don't know what to make of you—! [*She goes out.*]

POLLANT. How have you been, Kerry, my friend?

KERRIGAN. It isn't how have I been. It's how have you been? Have you told them yet?

POLLANT. [*Hesitantly*] No—that is, I haven't had a chance—

KERRIGAN. Not the chance! Make the chance. You're master in your own house, or ought to be. Why're you letting them do as they like with you—I tell you, Polly, your weakness disgusts me. If I weren't so damned fond of you—and if I weren't so damn grateful for the number of times you've helped me—I'd drop you—Yes, I would!

POLLANT. [*Gloomily acquiescent*] I know—I know—

KERRIGAN. For heaven's sake don't agree with me! Have some spunk about you—go in and tell 'em they can't move to their damn Riverside Drive—Do it now! Here you sit reading that Baedeker all the time—What's the use of reading that? Now I'll give you one more chance—and if you don't tell them—[*He leaves the threat unexpressed.*]

POLLANT. Kerry, if I only had your tongue, your Irish tongue, your oratory—

KERRIGAN. [*Not without complacency*] It's true me family was a race of speakers.

POLLANT. O'Connell was a great orator—

KERRIGAN. Well, if it comes to that, how about Moses? He wasn't bad at kidding 'em along—Of course he didn't know anything about economics. Everything depends on that—I tell you, Polly, Economic Determinism. [*Catching himself in time*] But that's neither here nor there—I'm going to give you one more chance, Polly, and if you don't tell 'em this time I'm through with trying to help you. You can go to your Riverside Drive and take the consequences—

POLLANT. But Kerry! They don't look at things the way you do. They don't know what I think of all the time—

KERRY. The money was left to you, wasn't it? You're the head of the family, aren't you? What a man you are, Polly! No backbone whatever—

POLLANT. I deserve what you say—

KERRIGAN. Don't agree with me—! Buck up! Tell 'em you won't move, and that you want to spend the money traveling—[*Suddenly an idea strikes him, he takes up the Baedeker, opens it, and begins to read—he knows* POLLANT'S *soft spot*—]

KERRIGAN. "The Protestant Cemetery is open from 7 A.M. till dark. It is a retired spot rising gently towards the city wall, affording pleasing views and shaded by lofty cypresses. Of the old cemetery Shelley wrote that it might make one in love with death to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place. Close to the entrance is the tomb of John Keats, bearing the melancholy inscription: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'—The eye will fall with interest on the tomb of the poet Shelley, whose ashes are buried here—"

POLLANT. Don't read any more, Kerry—Don't—!

KERRIGAN. [*Closing book*] All your life you've wanted to go to places, see things, where the wonderful men of the world lived and died—Now a miracle happens, God himself drops the money into

your lap, and you won't take advantage of it—Think of the golden places of the world! Italy, Spain, Germany, Cairo, Palestine—the immemorial home of your people—

POLLANT. I might make Momma see, but I don't think the children would come—

KERRIGAN. Then leave them behind—!

POLLANT. It sounds simple the way you say it, Kerry, but—you see—

KERRIGAN. Think, Polly! The graves of Byron and Keats, the waters where Shelley died, the Paris Villon knew—Why, with the present rate of exchange you can live in Italy for next to nothing, travel, do anything—

POLLANT. [*Aglow*] I must do it!

KERRIGAN. Call them in. Tell them now! I tell you it's a crime to squander your money on a vulgar apartment on Riverside Drive—develop in your family all the gilded parasitism of the Master Class—Why, they'll be worse there than here—a hundred times—It'll make them snobs as well as Philistines—

MRS. POLLANT. [*Entering*] Poppa! You got to eat some supper; you'll be sick.

KERRIGAN. [*Whispering*] Tell her now!

POLLANT. Goldie dear—I—I got to speak to you.

MRS. POLLANT. After you ate your supper, Isaac.

POLLANT. [*With a desperate firmness*] Now!

KERRIGAN. [*In a triumphant whisper*] That's the stuff!

MRS. POLLANT. What's come over you two?

POLLANT. [*Slowly*] I don't know about this moving to Riverside Drive—

MRS. POLLANT. You don't know—!

POLLANT. This Riverside Drive business don't appeal to me at all. Why should we spend all that money to show off with a lot of—lot of—

KERRIGAN. Parasites!

POLLANT. Parasites! That's right—parasites!

MRS. POLLANT. What's got through you, Isaac! Are you crazy? He picks tonight to tell us he don't wanta move—with the movers coming Monday—!

POLLANT. I never wanted to move—

MRS. POLLANT. Everybody knows Riverside Drive—what a fine neighborhood it is. And the air—right fresh from the River—

POLLANT. I know a place—better than Riverside Drive—it's not only better—it's cheaper—

MRS. POLLANT. Well—tell—

POLLANT. [*Sighing*] I'd like to move there with you and Beckie—

MRS. POLLANT. How long do I have to wait before you tell me—Where is it already?

POLLANT. Italy.

MRS. POLLANT. Italy!

POLLANT. Italy! I want to move to Italy.

MRS. POLLANT. [*Aghast*] Isaac! You don't mean where those dirty dagos come from!

POLLANT. [*Furious*] Italy! Where Shelley and Keats lived. It was good enough for them, I guess.

MRS. POLLANT. [*Turning on* KERRIGAN] It's you put him up to this!

KERRIGAN. I put him up to nothing. He's always wanted to live in Italy.

MRS. POLLANT. Maybe you want he should make speeches over there against the government!

POLLANT. Don't talk foolish, Goldie. With the rate of exchange like it is now between here and Europe we could live like lords—in Rome, in Venice, in Palestine—

MRS. POLLANT. [*Accusingly*] Isaac! You're a Zionist!

POLLANT. [*Helplessly*] You see, Kerry. She don't understand—

KERRIGAN. Mrs. Pollant, if I may be permitted to say so—you do not understand your husband. He is what you call romantic—He always has been—Poetry, music, literature—that's

all he really cares for. An unkind fate and a ridiculous economic system has kept his nose to the grindstone when he should be free to study, to travel, to feed his starved imagination—Now that Providence has made him affluent—in a small way of course—he can satisfy the dream of a lifetime—He can visit all the places he's longed to see—

MRS. POLLANT. [*With a sort of wail*] My God—!

[MILTON *strolls in from the dining-room, sucking a tooth-pick.*]

MILTON. What's all the shootin' for?

KERRIGAN. He's worked pretty hard, Mrs. Pollant. He looks ten years older than he really is—This thing will mean everything in the world to him—

MRS. POLLANT. You really want this, Isaac!

POLLANT. I'd like to see those lovely places—once—

MILTON. Say, what is all this?

KERRIGAN. The fact is, Milton, your father wants to travel. He wants to see the world.

MILTON. Why don't he join the Navy—?

[BERNICE *and* SIDNEY *come into the room.*]

BERNICE. Momma, Sid and I are going on upstairs to the party.

SIDNEY. [*Facetiously*] My motto is get there early and leave late. Hope they have good eats.

MRS. POLLANT. [*Anxiously*] No—don't go yet. Wait—Milton—

[MRS. POLLANT *is convinced at last that something is the matter with her husband. She begins whispering to* MILTON, *and* BERNICE *and* SIDNEY *join them, listening to* MRS. POLLANT'S *words.*]

KERRIGAN. [*To* POLLANT, *tensely*] Now's your chance. It's now or never. If necessary you must defy them all. You've made a good start. I'm proud of you. Tell them you won't stand for this Riverside Drive business. Tell them after this you'll do the deciding—Will you tell them?

POLLANT. [*Mopping his brow*] I'll try—

KERRIGAN. Your hand on it. [POLLANT *presents a limp hand, which his friend shakes vigorously.*] Courage—! Remember—Byron, Shelley—Italy—Spain—!

MILTON. [*Leaving the others*] Now then, Pop, what is this new bug of yours?

POLLANT. Don't you talk to me like that—I won't have it! You're not the boss of this house yet—

[MILTON *is considerably taken aback by this firm tone*; KERRIGAN'S *face is luminous with joy.*]

MILTON. You needn't get so huffy—I'm only asking for information—

POLLANT. All right, I give you the information. All my life I work for nothing—to make a living. No time to read, no time to study—Now we get a little money, I don't want to waste it on nothing—I want to make a little something of myself—and Beckie, too—What I want with—with Riverside Drive—

BERNICE. Why, Poppa, all the finest people in New York live there—!

POLLANT. The richest, you mean—

KERRIGAN. Exploiters—

MILTON. [*To* KERRIGAN] You keep your mug out of this!

POLLANT. Sure! Exploiters!

BERNICE. But we got the apartment all picked out and everything—!

MRS. POLLANT. And the movers coming Monday—

POLLANT. [*Defiantly*] Well, you can tell them not to come!

[MILTON *decides to change his tactics; he assumes an air of being extremely patient and reasonable.*]

MILTON. Er—what's your idea, Pop?

POLLANT. My idea? You should keep on working. Books ain't for you. Your Momma and Beckie and me go for a trip—

MILTON. Good idea! But that needn't keep us from living on the Drive. You can take a nice trip to Niagara Falls—or Bermuda! Real Ocean trip!

POLLANT. I don't meant a trip like that. I mean a trip for, maybe, a couple of years. All over Europe. Beckie can learn lots of languages and become really what you can call an educated lady—

BERNICE. Did you ever hear—! He wants me to be a school-teacher!

POLLANT. Why not? It's a fine thing, a school-teacher. Better than going to dances and spooning with that loafer, Sidney.

BERNICE. He's not a loafer—!

SIDNEY. Oh, well, if that's the way you feel about it, I guess I'll not trouble you any more—

MILTON. Stick around! The old man don't know what he's sayin'.

MRS. POLLANT. [*Anxiously*] Poppa didn't mean nothing by it—

SIDNEY. [*To door*] Nobody can call me a loafer and expect me to take it!

BERNICE. [*Holding him*] Please don't go, Sidney—!

SIDNEY. I'll come back to see you when your old man's out—

[SIDNEY *goes out the door, pulling* BERNICE *after him.*]

MRS. POLLANT. [*Angrily*] Now look at what you done! Driven Bernice's sweetheart from the door.

POLLANT. May I never see him again—the *schlemiel*—!

KERRIGAN. Good for you, Polly—!

[*Suddenly* MRS. POLLANT *bursts into tears.* MILTON *tries to quiet her.*]

MILTON. [*To his mother*] It's all right—he'll be all right—

POLLANT. [*Astonished*] Goldie! What you crying for? Just because I want to take you and Beckie to Europe—? You'll have the finest time—you'll see all the finest pictures, and all the places where the greatest men in the world lived—all the men who wrote those books there—I'll read you the books, too—you'll see how fine they are—

MRS. POLLANT. [*Sniffling*] Isaac, my crown, what's come over you?

MILTON. I guess you do need a little trip—change of air. Tell

you what I'll do—I'll call up Dr. Schlossberg and we'll talk it over—

POLLANT. [*In amazement*] Dr. Schlossberg!

MRS. POLLANT. Dr. Schlossberg is fine, Isaac—Only the other day Mrs. Finkbaum was saying to me she don't believe in God but she believes in Dr. Schlossberg—You know what he did for my asthma—

MILTON. [*Briskly*] A few weeks in the country'll fix you up, Pop—No doubt about it—you're just run down—When you come back we'll be all fixed up in the new flat, and you won't want to go to Europe.

MRS. POLLANT. Sure, Poppa! A few weeks at Rockaway maybe —You'll be a new man again—

[*As the truth suddenly dawns on* POLLANT, *he turns to look at* KERRIGAN *and finds* KERRIGAN *unable to meet his gaze. There is an embarrassed silence.* MRS. POLLANT *and* MILTON *stare at* POLLANT *curiously, as at a strange being from whom startling things may be expected.*]

POLLANT. [*Laughing hysterically*] They think I'm crazy, Kerry—

MILTON. Nothing of the kind, Pop—Just a bit run down, that's all—

MRS. POLLANT. God forbid—Isaac, my crown—

POLLANT. They think I'm crazy—

[*The telephone rings.* BERNICE, *who has just come in from bidding her beau good-by, stops to answer it.*]

BERNICE. [*Into telephone*] Oh, that you, Mrs. Vogel?—Yes—Something's come up—Wait a second—[*To the rest, her palm covering the transmitter*] It's Mrs. Vogel upstairs. She wants to know why we don't come up to the party.

MRS. POLLANT. Tell her Poppa ain't—feeling well—and we can't come—

POLLANT. [*Angrily*] Go to your party!

MRS. POLLANT. Isaac, my crown—!

POLLANT. Go to your party—I tell you you should go to your party—!

MILTON. [*With an air of humoring an irresponsible person*] Pop's right. Certainly we go to the party. [*To* BERNICE] Tell her we'll be right up.

BERNICE. [*Into telephone*] All right, Mrs. Vogel. We're just starting up. [*She hangs up the receiver.*]

MILTON. Why, Pop's perfectly well. Nothing the matter with him at all—Just a little run down—

BERNICE. [*As player-piano starts upstairs*] They've started dancing.

MILTON. Just take it easy, Pop. And if you want us, all you have to do is ring us—

MRS. POLLANT. Are you sure it's all right, Isaac?

POLLANT. Take them upstairs, Milton—

MRS. POLLANT. But, Isaac—!

MILTON. [*With the tone of one being cheerful in a sick-room*] Surest thing you know—[*To his mother*] Come on. Pop don't want to be bothered with you. He wants to be quiet and rest up a little—[*He herds his mother and* BERNICE *out.*] See you later, Pop—Better not read too much tonight—Go to bed early—

[*The three of them go out of hall door.*]

POLLANT. It's funny, isn't it? They think I'm crazy—

KERRIGAN. [*Unable to contain himself*] Are you going to let them get away with that! It was all I could do to keep from shouting at them. Where's your spunk, man! I'd be firmer now than ever—If they won't go abroad with you, go yourself—

POLLANT. [*Meditatively*] Who knows? Perhaps I am crazy—Perhaps they're the ones who aren't crazy—

KERRIGAN. Polly, you make me sick—you're hopeless—! You give in to them—

POLLANT. Well, maybe it's for the best—

KERRIGAN. [*Changing the subject*] Want to go down to 96th Street with me? I'm addressing a meeting on Irish freedom—

POLLANT. No thanks, Kerry. I'm too tired—

KERRIGAN. [*Sighing*] So this is the end of it—You're going to live on Riverside Drive after all—It fairly breaks my heart that you won't have your wish—I tell you what it is, it's the System—[*Hotly*] It's not your family that's to blame, nor England, nor Capitalists—it's the System! If we can just abolish the System—[*But he becomes aware that* POLLANT *is not listening, and he is a bit ashamed of his tirade.*] Well, good-night, Polly—I've got to be running—

POLLANT. [*Rousing himself*] Good-night, Kerry, my boy—

[KERRIGAN *goes out, closing the door softly. The pianola upstairs is still pouring out the latest song of the day.* POLLANT *looks up resignedly at the ceiling. His eye catches sight of the fat, red Baedeker. He smiles, picks up the book and starts reading—slowly, his lips moving, pronouncing the words distinctly, one by one.*]

POLLANT. "—cemetery Shelley wrote that it might make one in love with death to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place. Close to the entrance is the tomb of John Keats, bearing the melancholy inscription: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water—'"

[*The old man continues to read.*]

CURTAIN

GRANDMA PULLS THE STRING[1]

BY

EDITH BARNARD DELANO AND DAVID CARB

The authorship of *Grandma Pulls the String* belongs to two experienced writers—Edith Barnard Delano and David Carb. Since her first volume appeared in 1912 Mrs. Delano's name has been associated with a notable list of books and plays. Feature photoplays have become one of her chief preoccupations. David Carb is the author of several plays. The vividly remembered *Queen Victoria* was written in collaboration with Walter Prichard Eaton. This historical drama, in seven episodes, carries the queen from the morning of her accession, in 1837, to the celebration of her Diamond Jubilee, in 1897. The New York production of *Queen Victoria*, in 1923, by the Equity Players, was one of the season's outstanding theatrical events.

Grandma Pulls the String is a fine specimen of light comedy. The situation is a simple domestic conspiracy, but the wit with which it is exploited is more than usually subtle. The arch conspirator is Grandma,—the family tyrant,—perhaps a benevolent tyrant.

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CHARACTERS

Grandma Blessington
Mrs. Cummings, *her daughter*
Hildegarde Cummings
Julia Cummings
Nona Cummings Beaver
William Thornton

GRANDMA PULLS THE STRING

SCENE: *The Cummings's living-room.*

TIME: *An evening in winter.*

GRANDMA BLESSINGTON *is conveniently deaf, hearing only what she cares to hear—a fiction which the family maintains. She is distinctly the head of the family, and as the head of the family she insists that everything be done right. Which is to say, what she considers right. Grandma may seem to be aggressive and obtuse at times, but her meddling never really hurts anyone, and she gets a deal of fun out of it.*

MRS. CUMMINGS, *although she has gone through a similar experience two years before when Nona became engaged to George Beaver, is in no way annoyed or bored by the repetition. She has but one desire: to do everything she can for Julia. Of course, Julia is very young and William is not much older and they have plenty of time; but as soon as William is strong enough he is going back to a very good job, and the two are sweet together, so gay, so shy—She does wish Nona would be more sympathetic, and she does wish she could get Hildegarde to bed. Above all, she wishes there were some way to keep Grandma from meddling in.*

HILDEGARDE *is eleven or twelve years old, and she has begun to explore life—that is, she is reading all the love stories she can get hold of and she adores the movies. This evening she is dwelling and reveling in real romance: her sister Julia's "beau" is coming, and if things are managed properly "something" ought to happen. Hildegarde intends that something shall happen, if she can help things along. Ordinarily, older sisters are rather a nuisance; but tonight—*

JULIA *has known moments when she longed to drown the family, —you know what families are! Julia knows Bill Thornton cares*

for her and she is even surer that she loves him; if he were to propose to her, she wouldn't hesitate to say "yes." As a matter of fact, she longs for him to propose; but she does wish all this getting engaged stuff were not so complicated and didn't involve so many people; and she wishes the family would let her alone. However, Bill is to call this evening, and as he is leaving town tomorrow and he and she will have a few last hours together, that is all that really matters. Except her old coat.

NONA *is the oldest of the three Cummings girls. She is twenty-two, has been married almost two years, and so knows all there is to know about getting engaged and married—in fact, all there is to know about life. She will tell you so herself—although not directly; she is too blasé for that. A shrug expresses Nona's state of mind. As for Julia and young Thornton, her attitude is: of course girls get all flustered by such a perfectly natural thing as a proposal, but when they acquire a little more experience they will see how utterly natural and commonplace the whole business is.*

WILLIAM THORNTON *never dreamed, when he came to this town to recuperate, that he would meet The Girl. But he did. And now he has to go back home to the job, and having been away from it for two months, heaven only knows when he will be given another vacation. And their two towns are too far apart to make visiting over the week-ends possible. And he never could write letters—they never say what he wants them to. So this evening will be the end, unless—*

The Cummings living-room is plain, simple, cozy. In the rear is a door to the hall, from which the staircase mounts. At the right end of the hall is the outer door, at the left the dining-room; neither is visible. At the left of the living-room a fireplace contains gas logs. On the right are two windows, with a large sofa beneath them. There is a round center table, on which stands an electric lamp connected with the electrolier above. Chairs, ornaments, family photographs—the usual accessories. A mirror is over the mantel.

The curtain rises on an empty stage. There is no light in the room itself, but enough comes from the hall to dissipate the dark-

ness. Voices are heard—members of the family talking together, and calling from the dining-room and from upstairs.

Presently HILDEGARDE *descends importantly. She stands a moment regarding the room—the unromantic room. Then she switches on the table lamp and looks about her again critically. She lowers the window shades, drops the curtains over them, fluffs up the one cushion on the sofa. And then a new idea comes to her. She carefully places the cushion on the floor beside the sofa. She kneels on it.*

HILDEGARDE. Miss Julia, beautiful lady—[*She sighs fervently, rises, and once more regards the room critically. This time the light seems wrong. It ought to be soft and romantic, but she doesn't know how to make it so. She shades it with her little blue handkerchief, but the effect is neither warm nor romantic. She looks about, then goes to the fireplace and lights the gas logs, switches off the lamp, and once more kneels on the cushion.*] Miss Julia, beautiful lady, fairest lady of my dreams—[*She sighs ecstatically. The doorbell rings.* HILDEGARDE *does not heed it.*] Fairest lady of my dreams, I humbly beg you to accept my unworthy hand in the bond of holy matrimony and be mine. [*Once more the doorbell rings—this time peremptorily.* HILDEGARDE *jumps to her feet, somewhat bewildered, snapped out of an absorbing vision.*]

GRANDMA. [*From off stage*] Isn't anybody going to open the front door?

HILDEGARDE. [*Calling*] I will, Grandma.

[*She goes out. A door opens and closes.*]

NONA. [*Outside*]. Hello, dear. Where's everybody?

HILDEGARDE. Upstairs.

[*They come to the threshold of the room.* NONA *is wearing a handsome fur coat.*]

NONA. [*Calling*] Ooo-ooh!

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*From upstairs*] That you, Nona?

NONA. What are you doing?

MRS. CUMMINGS. Come on up.

[NONA *starts for the stairs.*]

HILDEGARDE. Sister Nona, come in here a minute!

NONA. In the parlor?

HILDEGARDE. [*Nodding*] I want to ask you something.

NONA. Why the heavy darkness? [*She moves towards the lamp.*]

HILDEGARDE. Oh, don't! I—don't you think the darkness is—nice?

NONA. Why yes! As darkness goes. But what's the idea?

HILDEGARDE. It's so—romantic!

NONA. Romantic—! You darling child, what on earth—

HILDEGARDE. It makes the room seem like a love bower.

NONA. A love—! Why, Hildegarde!

HILDEGARDE. [*Proudly*] *I* fixed the lights this way!!

NONA. You! *Your* love bower!!

HILDEGARDE. [*Impatient with her denseness*] Of course not! Not mine! Julia's.

NONA. Julia's! Soft lights—where's the music?

HILDEGARDE. [*Solemnly, rather regretfully*] There isn't any music.

NONA. Do you mean to say Julia is staging—?

HILDEGARDE. Sh—sh—! Julia doesn't know anything at all about it.

NONA. Then wh—

HILDEGARDE. [*Blurting it out*] She's dressing up in a brand-new blue chiffon she and mother made today, and the lace handkerchief Grandma gave me and Mother's amber beads and the silk stockings you gave her for Christmas, and she's got new slippers with silver buckles on them, and she's got a new vanity case that looks like solid gold and—

NONA. Hold on—hold on! What's it all about? What's Julia dolling up that way for?

HILDEGARDE. Mr. Thornton got well quicker'n he thought he would and he's got to go back home to Springfield tomorrow, and

this is his last night here and we think he'll ask Julia's hand in marriage—

NONA. Ask Julia's hand—! Oh—oh— [*She bursts into laughter.*]

HILDEGARDE. Sister Nona! Don't—don't—

NONA. Ask Julia's hand! [*She continues to laugh.*]

HILDEGARDE. Well, that's what gentlemen do when they propose!

NONA. Who told you so?

HILDEGARDE. I *know* it.

[*A pause.* NONA *stares at* HILDEGARDE, *bites her lip.*]

They kneel down and beg— —

NONA. Kneel down! You Victorian child—!

HILDEGARDE. [*Pointing*] He'll kneel on that very cushion. I put it there so's he could.

NONA. [*Laughing*] Oh, my dear—my dear—my dear—! What on earth makes you think he'll kneel?

HILDEGARDE. [*Proudly*] Mr. Thornton is a gentleman. He will do it the way a gentleman should.

NONA. And so you arranged all this—this scenery.

HILDEGARDE. [*Hurt*] I wanted to help.

> Lives of great men all remind us
> We can make our lives sublime!

NONA. Longfellow! My stars! [*To* HILDEGARDE] So you turned the lights out and—

HILDEGARDE. And put the cushion on the floor, so he won't get his trousers dusty when he kneels at her feet.

NONA. They still grow that young! [*Gathering the child in her arms*] You darling! Men don't kneel any more.

HILDEGARDE. Men *do*! And Mr. Thornton will. Because that's the right way to do it.

NONA. How do you know he'll do it at all, standing or—kneeling?

HILDEGARDE. [*Importantly*] Oh, we *know*.

NONA. Did he broadcast his intention?

HILDEGARDE. Of course not.

NONA. Listen, dear. That's not the way it's done. The man says, "Gee, you look good to me!" And the girl says, "What d'you say we hitch up?"

HILDEGARDE. [*Squirming out of her sister's embrace*] They don't! They don't!

NONA. Nowadays they—

HILDEGARDE. [*Defiantly*] They kneel at their ladylove's feet and pray her—

NONA. What a picture! [*She laughs.*] Imagine him—Poor Julia!

HILDEGARDE. I hate you!

NONA. Why, Hildegarde—!

HILDEGARDE. Nothing is sacred to you! You make fun of everything sacred. I—I hate you! [*In tears, she is running from the room.* NONA *switches on the table light.*]

[MRS. CUMMINGS *descends the stairs rapidly and enters, stopping* HILDEGARDE.]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Why, baby! Crying?

HILDEGARDE. Nona makes fun of everything sacred and—

NONA. But I'm married.

HILDEGARDE. I don't care! When a thing's beautiful and lovely it's—it's lovely whether you're married or not.

NONA. Love isn't lovely when you've been married awhile. [*She is delighted with her own cynicism.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Nona! [NONA *grins and shrugs.*] [*To* HILDEGARDE] There, baby dear, don't cry. Sister doesn't mean a word she says.

HILDEGARDE. She's just spoiled everything for me.

NONA. Well, it's not spoiled for Julia. And after all, this is her party—!

HILDEGARDE. But I wanted to help her get engaged *right*. A girl doesn't get engaged but once!

[NONA *and* MRS. CUMMINGS *exchange smiles.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. I hope not, dear. Now run upstairs and see if you can help her.

HILDEGARDE. [*Brightening*] Oh—I'll lend her my red leather belt! And maybe— [*She mounts the stairs importantly.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. The precious child! She takes everything so to heart!

NONA. [*Grinning mischievously*] Has the gentleman announced that he is going to snatch your second daughter from the arms of her loving family tonight, Mother?

MRS. CUMMINGS. Certainly not. Don't be absurd, Nona. But —well, after all, during the entire two months he's been rushing Julia. And I do think she's—well, fond of him. And since he has to go home tomorrow—well, there it is!—[*She has been brushing tables, straightening chairs, replacing ornaments, generally touching up the room as she chatted. Now she looks directly at* NONA *for the first time, and speaks as though she is glad to turn the subject.*] Why, Nona! What a *beautiful* coat!

NONA. [*Twirling about*] Isn't it wonderful? George made a lucky guess on the market and this is my share of the graft. I'm crazy about it.

MRS. CUMMINGS. It looks mighty expensive.

NONA. Oh, George isn't a cheap guy—when he's properly directed.

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Wistfully*] I wish Julia had a fur coat.

NONA. She'll have a dozen—if she catches Bill Thornton. [*She takes off the coat and throws it on a chair.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Oh, Nona! Catches! Haven't you any illusions?

NONA. [*Shrugs and grins.*] How could I have? I've been married two years!

MRS. CUMMINGS. You grow sillier every day.

NONA. [*Swiftly embracing her mother, laughing*] Nervous?

MRS. CUMMINGS. No, tired. We made a whole dress today.

NONA. Poor little mother!

MRS. CUMMINGS. When you have a daughter of your own you'll know how it feels to—

NONA. [*Her face close to her mother's*]Is that the only reason you're—flustered?

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Withdrawing*] What do you mean?

NONA. You and Hildegarde seem to be having a sentimental bat of your own!

[JULIA, *followed by* HILDEGARDE, *has come down the stairs in time to hear* NONA.]

JULIA. [*Speaking to* NONA *as to one who has been through it*] That's the right word, Nona, "sentimental." I've had to put up with this sort of thing for days! You'd think I was the ugliest duckling in the world and a million years old,—they're so overjoyed at the mere possibility of getting rid of me. There's nothing in it, anyway. Just because Bill is going away tomorrow and is coming to say good-by—

NONA. [*Patting her—and* JULIA *moves away from the pat.*] Don't let it get under your skin, old girl! George and I had to go through the same sort of thing.

JULIA. Hildegarde didn't sigh over you!

NONA. No. I was spared that.

[HILDEGARDE *stares at them round-eyed, hurt. Older sisters are incomprehensible; but they are as they are.*]

You look lovely.

JULIA. Like me?

NONA. Peach of a dress. Men adore blue.

JULIA. [*Confidentially*] What shall I do, Nona?

[MRS. CUMMINGS *is doing more things to the room.* HILDEGARDE *can't take her eyes off* JULIA.]

NONA. Grab him.

JULIA. You too! [*She turns away.*]

NONA. He *is* going to propose, isn't he?

JULIA. [*Flaming out at her*] You're as big a fool as the others!

NONA. [*Ambiguously*] That's what I was led to believe.

JULIA. He's going away tomorrow and he's coming tonight to say good-by. That's all there is to it.

NONA. [*Teasing*] Nothing else?

JULIA. I did think you would understand!

NONA. [*Relenting—almost tenderly*] I do, dear—I do.

JULIA. Then for goodness' sake help me!

NONA. You seem to have more help already than you can use.

JULIA. [*Blurting out her trouble*] I want to see him alone. And Dick is studying his lessons in the dining-room, and Grandma is going to insist on coming in here.

NONA. Why? She likes the dining-room better.

JULIA. Of course she does. She always says the light is bad in here. But tonight, ever since dinner, she's been complaining —the dining-room's chilly, Dick makes her drop stitches by grinning at her—as though that doesn't happen every night! She just wants to be in here with us. And somehow she'll manage to get here.

GRANDMA. [*Off stage*] Hildegarde!

JULIA. You see!

GRANDMA. Hilde-garde! Come wheel me into the parlor.

HILDEGARDE. [*At the top of her voice*] Let Dick do it.

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Sternly*] Hildegarde!

HILDEGARDE. What if Dick does race her old chair!

MRS. CUMMINGS. Go get your grandmother.

HILDEGARDE. I don't want to—

[*Nevertheless, she goes.*]

NONA. [*To* JULIA] Take him out somewhere.

JULIA. How can I? That dowdy old coat of mine—

NONA. He's seen it before!

JULIA. But—it's his last night.

NONA. He'll be thinking of you, not your coat.

JULIA. But his last sight of me must be—er—well, *not* a sloppy, shapeless, out-of-date, faded—

MRS. CUMMINGS. Your coat isn't as bad as all that, my dear! And what does it matter?

JULIA. It matters tremendously.

MRS. CUMMINGS. Wear mine!

JULIA. Oh, Mother!

MRS. CUMMINGS. Look what George gave Nona. [*She holds up the fur coat.*]

JULIA. Oh, how gorgeous!

NONA. Pretty nifty? He surprised me with it tonight.

JULIA. How did he know which you wanted?

NONA. Oh, I have a little way of taking him window-shopping! [*She is very proud of her foresight—she knows how to manage husbands!*]

JULIA. [*Stroking it*] A dream—A dream coat—Nona, could I? May I try it on?

[NONA *holds the coat and* JULIA *slips into it.*]

NONA. You look like a million dollars!

JULIA. I feel like Standard Oil! [*She twists about to look down at herself.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Nona, why couldn't you just let Julia wear—

JULIA. Oh, Nona! Would you? Let me wear it—just tonight?

NONA. I only got it today!

JULIA. Let me wear it tonight, Nona! One night couldn't possibly matter to you!

NONA. I wish I could, Julia. But I promised George I'd go with him—

MRS. CUMMINGS. Don't be selfish, Nona.

NONA. Is it selfish to want to wear your first fur coat yourself the first night you've got it? Why can't Julia entertain her beau here at home, like any other girl?

JULIA. You know perfectly well that Grandma is going to be in this room. And Dick's in the dining-room. And if we sat on the stairs Hildegarde would be hanging over the banisters. And even Mother will be wondering what is going on and—[*She has taken off the coat.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. No I won't, dear. I'll be in the dining-room keeping Dick quiet.

NONA. So you see! Nobody but Grandma will be in here with you. And she's deaf as a post.

JULIA. She's only deaf when she wants to be.

GRANDMA. [*Outside, testily*] Don't jiggle the chair so, Hildegarde.

HILDEGARDE. [*Loudly*] I'm *not* jiggling it!

GRANDMA. What say? If you're going to wheel me at all, please wheel me right. *Whatever's* worth doing is worth doing right.

[HILDEGARDE *wheels her into the living-room.* GRANDMA'S *eyes are bright, her mouth expressive and humorous—it can smile, too, when the rest of her face is impassive and innocent as a lamb's. All the time she is being wheeled in she is calmly knitting a red sweater, with a great ball of red yarn on her lap.*]

NONA. [*Loudly*] Good evening, Grandma. [*Kisses her.*]

GRANDMA. Yes, my dear. A good deal warmer in here.

NONA. [*Louder*] How are you?

GRANDMA. Well, I don't care if he is coming. He can freeze better than I can.

NONA. [*Grinning, in her usual tone*] He won't freeze! As far as I can see, the atmosphere is going to be warm enough.

HILDEGARDE. Yes, the fire in Julia's eyes will keep him warm.

[JULIA *is wondering how much more she can stand.* GRANDMA *glances quickly at the company, her eyes twinkling, a smile flickering on her lips. There is no doubt whatever that the old lady has heard them perfectly.*]

GRANDMA. Warm, did you say, Hildegarde? Yes, my dear, it *is* a nice warm color. [*She holds up the sweater she is knitting.*] Push me a little nearer the hearth, child. Fire on the hearth, fire in my lap, fire in Julia's eyes, fire in Willie's heart—

JULIA. *Don't* call him Willie.

GRANDMA. Yes, fire in Willie's heart—You'd think the house would burn up, with so much loose fire.

[HILDEGARDE *is staring at* JULIA—*her heart is wrung for* JULIA. *The others look at their mother,* JULIA *beseechingly,* NONA *with a grin.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Bending over the chair*] Mother dear, don't you want to come upstairs with Nona and me?

GRANDMA. [*Confidentially*] I agree with you, Juliet, Nona is *not* the same since she got married. More uppish than ever.

NONA. The old humbug! She hears everything that's said!

GRANDMA. [*Her eyes narrowing*] Seems to me she gets more selfish every day she lives. Feel sorry for her husband.

NONA. [*Flaring*] He doesn't need your sympathy!

MRS. CUMMINGS. Nona! Your grandmother!

NONA. She insults me every time I set my foot in this house.

JULIA. You're not so very considerate of her, either!

NONA. Why should I be? She's an old fake, that's what she is! Pretending to be an invalid, making believe she's deaf just so we'll say things before her—

MRS. CUMMINGS. She's an old lady and she's your grandmother—!

NONA. Yes, and she never lets anybody forget it for one minute! Oh, of course Julia's always been her favorite! We all know that! [*She grabs up her coat and starts for the door.*]

GRANDMA. [*Blandly*] Going home, Nona?

NONA. Good-night, Grandma. [*She pecks at her cheek.*]

GRANDMA. [*Holding on to the coat*] My! What a fine fur coat!

NONA. [*A little appeased*] Like it?

GRANDMA. What say?

NONA. I say—do you *like* it?

GRANDMA. Must have cost a heap of money! How much did you say it cost?

NONA. I didn't say.

GRANDMA. How much?

NONA. [*Loudly*] I don't know.

GRANDMA. You'll ruin that husband of yours quicker than he can ruin himself. And they already call him Poorhouse George.

NONA. What! Who dares— ?

GRANDMA. [*So innocently, her head a little on one side to get her knitting closer to the light so she can pick up a stitch*] That's what they say—

[NONA *gasps in anger, glares at the benign-looking old lady a moment, and flounces out.* MRS. CUMMINGS *follows. She is seen inducing* NONA *to go into the dining-room with her. They disappear.*]

JULIA. Oh dear! I must be a sight! Jumping around so, and everybody so cross— ! Oh, I do wish I—

HILDEGARDE. [*Who has scarcely taken her eyes off* JULIA] You don't! You look perfectly beautiful. You look like a dish—dish —[*She is trying to say "disheveled," but she only mumbles the last part of the word. As* JULIA *stares at her she hastens to add*] You look like a—a princess.

GRANDMA. Pinched? Did you say Julia looked pinched? Come here, Julia— ! Rub your cheeks, child, rub your cheeks! Your hand's cold. You ought to have a fur coat like Nona's.

JULIA. Don't I know it!

GRANDMA. Mighty cold tonight.

JULIA. It's nice and cozy upstairs, Grandma.

GRANDMA. Yes, this is a cozy room. I always did like to look at a fire. Makes me feel like a young girl again—soft and fluttery and—and sad. The way I used to feel when gentlemen came sparking *me*. [*She sighs lingeringly.*] Ah me—romance—there's not much romancy nowadays— !

HILDEGARDE. If she feels so romantic, why doesn't she let somebody else have a chance to get that way, too!

JULIA. Hildegarde, you mustn't talk about your grandmother that way.

HILDEGARDE. I don't care! It's cruel and wicked for her to spoil your romance, Julia.

JULIA. I haven't any romance. And if I had, she wouldn't be spoiling it. And if she could spoil it, then it wouldn't be worth spoiling anyway. [JULIA *bites her lip. She is almost in tears.*]

HILDEGARDE. You could have a romance, Julia! But if Mr. Thornton doesn't get a chance to see you alone, how can he—?

JULIA. Oh, my goodness! How can he what?

HILDEGARDE. [*Solemnly*] Make you an offer. [*Ecstatically*] Oh, he's so handsome!—

JULIA. Oh my goodness, Hildegarde, if you don't stop—

HILDEGARDE. No woman could resist such a beautiful man. And oh—his neckties!

JULIA. [*Still exasperated, but amused in spite of herself*] You take him, then, Hildegarde! You're welcome to him! I wish I'd never laid eyes on him. I wish—[*The doorbell rings.* JULIA *jumps, clasps her hands together, doesn't know which way to run. She glances at* GRANDMA.] Oh—dear! [*She looks in the mirror over the mantelpiece.*] I'm a fright! Where's my vanity box? Oh—upstairs—You let him in, Hildegarde! [*She rushes above.*]

HILDEGARDE. Don't go, Julia! You ought to be here when he comes in, Julia! Julia! Oh *dear*—! [*She starts for the door, returns, tiptoes to the mirror and fusses up her hair, starts again for the door, observes that the cushion is no longer on the floor—* MRS. CUMMINGS *had replaced it on the sofa. She tosses the cushion down once more, leaves it, comes back, straightens it a little, pats it.* GRANDMA *has been a close and interested observer of the performance—there really isn't much that* GRANDMA *misses.*]

GRANDMA. Wasn't that the doorbell?

HILDEGARDE. Yes ma'am. I'm going right away. Oh, my handkerchief! [*She fishes deep into her frock for it.*]

GRANDMA. Want Willie to freeze out there? Won't be able to pop the question if his teeth are chattering. Warm outside warm inside—and *not* vice versa!

[HILDEGARDE *is at the threshold.*]

Move me nearer the lamp.

HILDEGARDE. In a minute.

GRANDMA. [*Emphatically*] Now!

HILDEGARDE. [*Obeying*] Oh dear, oh dear! He'll think we don't

want him. He'll think we're trying to freeze him out! [*A horrible thought comes to her.*] Maybe he's gone!

[*The bell rings again. She dashes out.*]

GRANDMA. More thrilling to her than her own will be. Children take it hard, old folks take it smiling, and lovers take it—soft and sticky—[*With a quirk of her lips*] like molasses candy—[*Laughs tenderly.*]

THORNTON. [*Off stage*] Good evening, Hildegarde.

HILDEGARDE. [*Off stage*] Why, good evening, Mr. Thornton! How *do* you do? Please step right in and remove your coat. Let me hang it up for you. Cold night, isn't it? Walk this way, please! You want to see Sister Julia, I suppose? I think she will receive you.

[HILDEGARDE *and* THORNTON *enter.* THORNTON *crosses to* MRS. BLESSINGTON.]

THORNTON. How d'ye do, Mrs. Blessington?

GRANDMA. [*Taking his proffered hand briefly*] What say?

THORNTON. [*Shouting*] I said, how d'ye do?

GRANDMA. No. I don't hear so well. Not in winter.

HILDEGARDE. [*Patting the sofa*] Won't you be seated, Mr. Thornton? Here!

THORNTON. If you don't mind, I'll thaw my hands a little.

GRANDMA. Cold tonight. Cold enough to freeze the heart.

THORNTON. Not the heart, Mrs. Blessington.

GRANDMA. The nose, too. [*Suddenly self-conscious, he turns to the mirror over the mantel, touches his nose.* GRANDMA *smiles fleetingly.*] Funny about noses! When a person's nose is blue his blood's white. And when his blood is blue his nose is white. And when his nose is red, his blood is, too!

THORNTON. [*Grinning*] You're quite a philosopher, Mrs. Blessington.

GRANDMA. I've got rheumatism.

HILDEGARDE. Are you warm yet, Mr. Thornton?

THORNTON. Considerably thawed, thanks.

HILDEGARDE. Then do come over here, please. [*With an elegant wave of the hand towards the sofa*] Please be seated.

[THORNTON *sits down.* HILDEGARDE *always amuses him.*]

THORNTON. You're looking mighty fit this evening, Mary Pickford!

HILDEGARDE. [*With eighteenth-century coyness, evidently seen in the movies*] Oh law, sir!

[*As he stretches his legs slightly,* THORNTON'S *feet touch the cushion on the floor.*]

Oh, don't!!

THORNTON. [*Startled*] What?

HILDEGARDE. You mustn't put your feet on that!

THORNTON. [*Embarrassed, examining his shoes*] Why—er—

HILDEGARDE. It's not there for shoes.

THORNTON. Oh, I beg pardon! I thought it was a sort of footstool. [*He stoops to pick it up.*]

HILDEGARDE. [*Restraining him*] No!—! I put it there, you see, for—for knees. [*He is puzzled. She interprets that as love's diffidence, and clasps her hands. Then she moves deliberately, with what she conceives as enormous dignity, to the hall and calls.*] Oh sister Julia! Mr. Thornton is in the parlor.

JULIA. Be right down.

[*Meanwhile* THORNTON *has regarded his knees curiously, then the cushion, then his knees again. He can make nothing of* HILDEGARDE'S *remark. Now she returns.*]

THORNTON. You said knees. Is it some new kind of praying cushion?

HILDEGARDE. [*Beaming*] Yes. That's just what it is! A praying cushion. Gentlemen always kneel when they pray the fair lady of their heart—

JULIA. [*Still from above*] Hilde-garde! Come here a moment!

HILDEGARDE. [*Departing*] Gentlemen always kneel when they pray the fair lady of their heart to— [*She goes.*]

[THORNTON'S *bewilderment gradually gives way to amusement. He chuckles, looks at the cushion, at his knees, chuckles again.*]

THORNTON. [*To himself*] I wonder if that kid meant me?

GRANDMA. [*As though to herself, but quite distinct enough for him to hear*] Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing *right*—business, housework, love-making—[*Directly at him*] Have you ever been in love, young man?

THORNTON. [*Confused*] I! Why—er—I—

GRANDMA. Ever have it so bad you got engaged?

THORNTON. Oh no! Never—never—

GRANDMA. As often as that! Tut tut! Then you ought to know how to propose *right*! They say practice makes perfect.

THORNTON. [*Louder*] I say I never have been engaged! I've never proposed to anybody in my life!

GRANDMA. My! You're quite a feller with the girls, aren't you? If an old woman may be permitted to ask—in confidence, of course—how do you usually go about it?

THORNTON. But I tell you I—

GRANDMA. Oh, come now! You needn't mind telling me, William! I've been through it myself, you know. Do you jump right in or do you lead up to it gradually?

THORNTON. [*Shouting*] But I tell you I have never proposed to—[*Suddenly realizing that his shouts can be heard all over the house, he breaks off in confusion, gets up and walks to the door, glances upstairs, crosses to the fireplace nearer* GRANDMA.]

GRANDMA. [*Placidly knitting*] Never been accepted? Why, William, I'm surprised at you! You must have gone about it in the wrong way. Which did you say was your method?—sudden or gradual?

THORNTON. [*Swallowing first, trying to pitch his voice so she but not the rest of the household can hear*] Neither, Mrs. Blessington. I never have—

GRANDMA. That's too bad. You ought to have tried the other way. Gradual. [*She sighs reminiscently, and drops a stitch, bends closer to the light to pick it up.*] Dear me! I remember so well the way my poor husband did it. He said, "Maria, I—I—" And I said to him,—and it's as true now, William, as it was then—I

said, "John, what's worth doing at all is worth doing *right*!" So he began all over again. [*She stops.*]

THORNTON. [*Still extremely uncomfortable*] Er—er—really—?

GRANDMA. [*Smiling at him benignly*] You really want to know? Now that's a spirit I approve of, William! When people really want to learn I'm always willing to help them. Mr. Blessington said, "It's a fine evening," and I said, "Yes, Mr. Blessington, very fine. Won't you sit down?" So we sat down. And then he said I was looking mighty pretty—I was wearing blue. I tell you, I blushed, when Mr. Blessington praised my looks and my blue dress. I said, "Oh, Mr. Blessington—!" Then he said he hoped my parents were well, and asked whether they were at home. I said, "Oh—do you want to see *them*?" And he said, quite excited, "No—oh no—I—I want to see you—only you—all my life, Maria! You—alone!" My heart was pounding like a drum.

THORNTON. [*Interested in spite of his embarrassment*] But of course you knew all along—

GRANDMA. I sat there and sat there, and so did he. I began to think he never would get any more out. But after a while he reached over and touched my hand. It was resting between us on the sofa.

THORNTON. [*Grinning*] By accident?

GRANDMA. I drew it away. Girls did, in those days. I murmured, "Why, Mr. Blessington!" Of course he was quite overcome with shame at his—er—boldness. He walked back and forth, reproaching himself. He said—"Pardon me, Maria, pardon me! To take advantage of your innocence! But I—I—" Then he came straight over to the sofa where I was sitting. He put his hand on his heart, and made me a bow. And then he knelt on a hassock at my feet. "Maria," he said, "I love you! Will you do me the great, the overwhelming honor of considering me an humble aspirant for your hand?"

THORNTON. [*Enormously amused*] What did you say to that, Mrs. Blessington?

GRANDMA. I remembered my bringing up. Girls did, in those days. I raised my hand—like this—as though I did not know what he meant. I said, "My hand, Mr. Blessington—?" So he had to say it the right way.

THORNTON. What way?

GRANDMA. He said—"Will you grant me the inestimable privilege of loving you and caring for you all the rest of your life? In short, will you make me the most supernally happy man on earth by deigning to become my wife?" I grew quite faint—girls did, in those days. I thought I should have the vapors. I murmured, "Oh, Mr. Blessington, this is so sudden!" And so it was done! And that's how it ought to be done, young man! [*She smiles up at him.*] Think you know how, now?

THORNTON. [*Uncomfortably*] Of course.

GRANDMA. Say it over.

THORNTON. Why—really—

GRANDMA. [*Firmly*] Say it, William!

THORNTON. [*Yielding, because he has to, but aware of what a ridiculous position he is in*] "Will you grant me the—the—"

GRANDMA. The inestimable privilege.

THORNTON. "Will you grant me the inestimable privilege of loving you—"

GRANDMA. Loving *and* caring for you. Caring is very important to a woman, William.

THORNTON. "*And* caring for you forever."

GRANDMA. All the rest of your life.

THORNTON. "All the rest of your life."

GRANDMA. "In short, will you make me supernally happy by deigning to become my wife?"

THORNTON. [*He seems to find the room very warm.*] "In short, will you make me supernally happy by deigning to become my wife?"

GRANDMA. That's right. Now the next time you propose, do it that way, and you'll get the girl.

[JULIA *enters, going directly towards* THORNTON, *her hand outstretched. He grasps it as though it were a life-preserver.*]

[GRANDMA *speaks rather louder, more pointedly.*] The right way —the way it *ought* to be done!

JULIA. Bill!—

THORNTON. Julia!—

[*They gaze at each other, lost in each other. A rather long silence, while* GRANDMA *knits contentedly. Then she smiles a little.*]

GRANDMA. Julia! Get my shawl.

[*They pay no heed.*]

Julia, my dear!

JULIA. [*Coming back to earth*] Yes, Grandma?

GRANDMA. Get my shawl.

[JULIA *looks about the room, a little dazed.*]

THORNTON. Let me—!

GRANDMA. It's upstairs.

JULIA. [*Flashing a smile at* THORNTON] Just a minute!

[*She runs out, and up the stairs.* THORNTON *gazes after her.*]

GRANDMA. She's a good girl, Julia. Though girls aren't what they used to be.

THORNTON. She's—perfect.

GRANDMA. Well. She likes to gallivant. Woman's place is in the home.

THORNTON. Woman's place is in the heart!

[JULIA *flits down with the shawl, lays it across* GRANDMA'S *shoulders.*]

GRANDMA. No—I don't need it yet a while.

[THORNTON *and* JULIA *are again lost in each other; they don't even know they are still standing.*]

THORNTON. By Jove, you look lovely tonight!

[GRANDMA *throws them a glance, smiles.*]

That dress is a corker!

JULIA. [*Laughing a little*] This old thing—? Like it?

THORNTON. It's a marvel.

JULIA. Don't be silly! Mother and I made it ourselves!

THORNTON. How is your mother?

JULIA. Oh, she's all right! Want to see her?

THORNTON. I don't want to see anybody in the world but you.

[GRANDMA *has a little coughing spell.* THORNTON *looks at her.*]

Look here, Julia, isn't there some place we could go—some other room—?

JULIA. I—I'm afraid there isn't.

THORNTON. Then can't you get the old Gorgon out of here? You know she's a—

[GRANDMA *is unmoved,* JULIA *suddenly very nervous.*]

JULIA. Won't you sit down, Bill?

[*Again* GRANDMA *throws them a glance, which* THORNTON *catches.*]

THORNTON. Say, you know, honestly, she's a—

JULIA. [*Nervously, impressively, shaking her head at him, to his slight bewilderment*] Won't you sit *down,* Bill? Over here—!

[*They cross to the sofa and sit down.*]

THORNTON. Gosh, Julia, you knock me out, in that dress! Blue certainly is your color. You know—I'm crazy about—

[GRANDMA'S *big ball of red yarn rolls on the floor.*]

GRANDMA. [*Quietly*] My yarn, William.

[THORNTON *picks it up, rolling it as he goes to return it to her.*]

Thanks.

THORNTON. [*Standing*] Say, look here, Julia! Let's go out somewhere! How about the movies?

JULIA. Oh, it's too cold.

THORNTON. I'll get a cab. Come on!

JULIA. You can't talk at the movies.

THORNTON. Most people don't know it! Please—!

JULIA. Besides—it's so dark you can't see— the person you're with.

THORNTON. [*Delighted*] Julia. [*He crosses quickly to the sofa, sits down close to her.*] Julia, you *want* to see me! You—

[GRANDMA'S *ball slips from her lap again and rolls almost to their feet.*]

GRANDMA. William, my yarn.

[THORNTON'S *lips compress, but again he rolls up the yarn and returns the ball to the old lady and himself to the sofa.*]

THORNTON. Let's go to a restaurant, then.

JULIA. I couldn't eat a thing.

THORNTON. You wouldn't have to. But we've just got to get away from here! Please, Julia!

JULIA. I—honestly, I can't Bill. This—this dress is too thin, and—

THORNTON. Put on another one.

JULIA. I thought you liked me in this!

THORNTON. I like you in anything, you're so—

[GRANDMA'S *ball of yarn rolls almost to their feet.* THORNTON *picks it up, returns it with a sort of dragged briskness.*]

JULIA. [*As he comes back*] Oh, let it stay on the floor next time.

THORNTON. You see for yourself we've simply got to go somewhere.

JULIA. But you've been sick, Bill. You ought to stay where it's warm. Do you think you're really strong enough to go back home tomorrow?

THORNTON. I've been well for weeks. I've just been staying on here because I—

JULIA. Do you still take your tonic?

THORNTON. Once in a while.

JULIA. Oh, you *must* take it regularly. Promise me you'll take it regularly.

THORNTON. Do you care?

JULIA. [*Demurely*] I'll be anxious.

THORNTON. Do you care?

JULIA. Well—I—of course I'd hate to think of your having a relapse.

THORNTON. Why?

JULIA. Oh well, I—I hate to think of anybody suffering.

THORNTON. Is that the only reason?

[*She doesn't answer. He seizes her hand. Her eyes meet his. And—the ball of yarn rolls across the floor. He kicks it viciously.*]

Damn!

JULIA. [*Laughing a little*] She's an old lady, Bill!

THORNTON. She thinks I'm a retriever.

[JULIA *has picked up the ball this time, and as she winds it towards* GRANDMA *she throws him a laughing look over her shoulder. She puts the ball on* GRANDMA'S *lap, bends over the back of the old lady's chair, and speaks close to her ear.*]

JULIA. Now I warn you, Grandma, that's the last time! You be more careful! [*She kisses* GRANDMA'S *cheek.*]

GRANDMA. [*Blandly*] Warm? Yes, it's a nice warm color. I always did like red. William prefers blue.

[JULIA *returns to the sofa.*]

JULIA. She won't drop it again. [*Picks the pillow off the floor.*] Lean forward! [*He leans towards her, and she stuffs the pillow behind him.*] Now lean back!

THORNTON. Not on your life! [*He pulls the pillow from behind him. The sight of it reminds him of something, and he laughs.*]

JULIA. What's the matter?

THORNTON. [*He drops the pillow on the floor again.*] That's the place for that! Hildegarde told me so!

JULIA. Hildegarde! [*Then, suspiciously*] What's Hildegarde been saying to you?

THORNTON. She's a funny kid! Sentimental!

JULIA. [*Alarmed*] Sentimental—!

THORNTON. And romantic as the dickens. Like your grandmother.

JULIA. Grandma!

THORNTON. They both seem to have their ideas about how things ought to be done. Some things especially. Hildegarde seems to have some sort of vague yearnings for the Sir Walter Raleigh act. Your grandmother—

JULIA. Bill, what have those two been—

THORNTON. Oh, the old lady's been telling me some yarn or other. And Hildegarde—

JULIA. Oh! This family—!

THORNTON. [*Bending closer*] Come now, Julia! Let's not pretend! What's the good of beating about the bush? They know I'm crazy about you—anybody can see that! I—

[GRANDMA'S *ball rolls almost viciously across the floor and under the sofa.* THORNTON *is very effectively checked.*]

Oh, confound it! What's the matter with her, anyway?

JULIA. Sssh!

[THORNTON *stoops, cannot reach the ball, kneels down on the cushion and reaches under the sofa. Bringing out the ball, he laughs up at* JULIA.]

THORNTON. Not such a bad idea this, of Hildegarde's! [*Suddenly serious*] Julia, I'm kneeling at your feet—

JULIA. Don't be absurd!

THORNTON. —where I ought to kneel! I want to kneel at your feet forever, Julia—kneel and—and adore you!

[HILDEGARDE *peeks around the corner of the door. Seeing him doing it her way, she forgets discretion, claps her hands noiselessly, and jumps up and down in the opening.*]

Julia, I do adore you! You know I do a—

[*He sees* HILDEGARDE, *is overcome with confusion, gulps, stares. She dodges back, runs past the door.* JULIA, *following his look, sees nothing. Then she becomes concerned.*]

JULIA. Bill, you *are* ill!

THORNTON. I don't know! No—I'm not! I—I guess I'm sort of—haunted, or something.

JULIA. Haunted— !

THORNTON. [*Desperately*] Look here, Julia, you know I love you and—

[GRANDMA *jerks the string sharply. It reminds him that he has the ball in his hands. He looks at it, dazed; looks along the string, jumps angrily to his feet and stalks across to her, plumping the ball rather decidedly in her lap. He strides angrily back to the sofa.*]

Get your hat and coat— !

JULIA. No, Bill. I can't go out.

THORNTON. You do as I say! I won't endure this any longer. Come on—get your coat!

JULIA. She'll fall asleep in a little while.

THORNTON. Where is your coat?

JULIA. Oh—Oh dear—I simply can't wear that coat!

THORNTON. Oh, for Gosh sake! What's the matter with your coat? Wear mine! Come on!

JULIA. [*Almost weeping*] I *can't*!

THORNTON. Say, is everybody crazy around here—or just me?

GRANDMA. [*Placidly*] Julia!—Oh Julia— !

[THORNTON *jerks his shoulders angrily.* JULIA'S *lips are trembling. She throws* THORNTON *a beseeching look which he will not see.*]

Oh Julia— ! !

JULIA. Yes, Grandma?

GRANDMA. Julia, did I ever tell you the story about the man who looked at the moon?

[THORNTON *laughs shortly, thrusts his hands in his pockets.*]

JULIA. Yes, Grandma. I know it by heart— !

GRANDMA. The man was walking in the meadows one night and—

JULIA. [*Shouting*] You *have* told it to me, Grandma!

GRANDMA. All right, dear—I'm *going* to tell it to you. Don't let yourself become so excited, Julia. This man was walking in the—

THORNTON. [*While* GRANDMA *is still mumbling her story*] Julia! Don't you *see* how impossible it is to stay here?

JULIA. It's just as impossible to go—!

THORNTON. [*He is standing in front of the sofa looking down at her.*] Our last evening together—and much you seem to care about it!

JULIA. Oh—I know—our last—But I—

THORNTON. [*Pleading*] Look here, Julia! What's all this mystery about going out with me? I'm not asking you to Africa or the moon!

JULIA. I'd *go* with you to Africa—or the moon—!

THORNTON. [*Dropping down to the sofa beside her, ecstatically*] Julia—

JULIA. [*Hastily, drawing back a little*] Oh—lots of girls are like that! A girl might go to the end of the world with a man when she—when she wouldn't go to a movie with him.

THORNTON. [*He has her hand.*] You mean you'll go to the end of the world with me—? Julia, you darling—! You—I—

[*The ball of yarn rolls yet again.*]

GRANDMA. [*Who has been mumbling her story, now is audible once more.*] And the moon was only a scarecrow grinning at him! It hadn't fallen out of the sky at all! What do you think of that, William?

THORNTON. [*Wearily, despairingly returning the ball*] Yes, Mrs. Blessington.

GRANDMA. It only goes to show that there's a right way and a wrong way to do everything; and if a thing is worth doing at all it's worth doing *right*. [*She throws him a sharp glance as he stands over her. He understands, grins a moment as it dawns on him, passes a hand over his mouth, goes stiffly across the floor, bows to* JULIA *from the hips.*]

THORNTON. Julia, will you do me the great honor of considering me an humble aspirant for your hand?

[JULIA *looks at him in amazement and consternation.*]

JULIA. I knew you were still sick! Lie down here! [*She gets up, and puts the pillow on the sofa as she speaks.*]

THORNTON. She's making me act like a confounded phonograph.

JULIA. [*Even more distressed*] Oh—it's too warm in here for you! Lie down. Please, Bill! Relax! Close your eyes!

THORNTON. How could I close my eyes when you're looking at me like that—the loveliest, sweetest—

JULIA. I'm going to 'phone for Dr. Hartley!

[*She starts for the door.*]

THORNTON. [*Catching her hand*] No—no—no. My darling, I've got you now—[*The ball hits his foot. He kicks it away.*]

JULIA. [*Drawing away from him*] Take it to her, Bill.

THORNTON. Not until I've said what I have to say! I've got you now and I'm never going to let you go until you promise—

GRANDMA. [*Calling, with a rising inflection*] Hil-de-garde—!

HILDEGARDE. [*Suspiciously near*] Yes, Grandma.

GRANDMA. Pick up my yarn.

[HILDEGARDE *appears, and, staring big-eyed at* THORNTON *and* JULIA, *backs with it to the old lady.* GRANDMA *continues oh, so kindly.*]

Sit down near grandma, dear.

[*With alacrity* HILDEGARDE *obeys, squats on the floor, and continues to gaze with all her eyes at the lovers.*]

THORNTON. This is too much.

JULIA. [*Miserably*] They'll go to bed soon.

THORNTON. I'll be gone sooner. [*He makes for the door.*]

JULIA. Bill—! Hildegarde, Mother wants you!

HILDEGARDE. Grandma told me to stay here with her.

JULIA. I'll take care of Grandma. [*She is gently pushing* HILDEGARDE *out.*]

HILDEGARDE. [*In a loud whisper*] Has he done it yet?

[JULIA *gives her a shake and a push.*]

GRANDMA. [*Almost drawling it*] Put my shawl over my shoulders, Hildegarde.

[HILDEGARDE *breaks away from her sister and skips over for the shawl.* JULIA *catches her and propels her from the room.*]

JULIA. You go right upstairs and stay there. [*She crosses the room towards her grandmother, with the shawl.*]

GRANDMA. I said I wanted Hildegarde to do it for me.

JULIA. [*Loudly*] It's her bedtime, Grandma.

THORNTON. You positively won't go out?

[JULIA *shakes her head dolefully. She is utterly miserable. So is he.*]

[*Despairingly*] Oh, well—[*He slumps down on the sofa. A long silence. At last he has an inspiration, sits up.*] Julia, come here.

[JULIA *obeys.*]

Look. She's deaf. So if we sit very close together and talk low she won't hear what we're saying.

JULIA. [*Dubiously*] Maybe not. [*But after all, she knows* GRANDMA *will hear every word.*] Oh, Bill, I'm so sorry this happened.

THORNTON. You couldn't help it, Julia. But you might have gone somewhere with me.

JULIA. Oh, please don't begin that again!

THORNTON. I've simply got to tell you something. I can't write it—I'm a dub at letters, and anyway—This is our last evening together. It's the last chance I'll have to say—to tell—to ask you—

JULIA [*With a quick intake of breath*] What, Bill?

THORNTON. To ask you if you will—

[*Simultaneously* HILDEGARDE'S *curls are seen at the edge of the door opening and* GRANDMA'S *ball rolls over to him. His tongue is paralyzed. He swallows once or twice.* JULIA *takes his hand.*]

JULIA. [*Desperately—she knows what has stopped him.*] What, Bill?

[HILDEGARDE *is framed in the doorway, much more excited—externally at least—than the principals of the comedy.*]

Don't mind them, Bill!

THORNTON. [*Gets up, pumps his fists up and down once or twice, presses his lips together. Then he grabs up the sofa pillow, throws*

it on the floor again, and plumps down on his knees before JULIA. *He speaks loudly.*] Fairest lady of my dreams, will you grant me the inestimable privilege of loving *and caring* for you all the rest of my life? In short, will you make me supremely happy—

GRANDMA. [*Sharply*] Supernally!

THORNTON. Make me "supernally" happy by deigning to become my wife?

[JULIA *has been staring, wide-eyed. Now at last she catches on. For a moment she and* THORNTON *gaze at each other, then* JULIA *rocks with suppressed laughter.*]

JULIA. [*Very loudly*] Sir, you do me too much honor! [*In a low tone*] Bill—!

THORNTON. [*Under his breath*] You darling! Will you—?

JULIA. [*Low tone*] Of course I will! Oh—*Bill*!

THORNTON. You're the most wonderful—[*Their hands together*]

JULIA. My —man!

[*An ecstatic silence.*]

THORNTON. I've just got to kiss you!

JULIA. Oh, Bill—

THORNTON. [*Glancing swiftly about the room*] You've *got* to come, now!

JULIA. Now I don't care how I look!

THORNTON. You look perfect to me! Gosh, I—

JULIA. Will I always—look perfect—to you?

THORNTON. Always! And a day beyond that!

JULIA. Oh, Bill!—

[*A pause.*]

THORNTON. Come on—That kiss—!

JULIA. Yes—Oh, Bill—[*They have forgotten* GRANDMA, *forgotten* HILDEGARDE, *forgotten everything in the world except themselves. They move rapidly towards the door.*]

GRANDMA. William, where's my yarn?

JULIA. Oh, bother!

THORNTON. Let *her* bother!

JULIA. [*Happily*] Yes—

[*They go out.*]

GRANDMA. [*In a rage*] Julia—! You Julia! You come right back here and pick up my yarn! Julia, come back here! Ju—lia! Ju-lia! Don't you dare go away and leave my yarn on the floor. Ju-lia! Ju-lia!

HILDEGARDE. [*Entering*] What's the matter, Grandma?

GRANDMA. You go get Julia. Tell her to come back into this room.

[HILDEGARDE *is stooping for the ball.*]

Don't you touch that! You go call Julia to come back—

HILDEGARDE. [*Solemnly*] She's engaged, Grandma.

GRANDMA. I don't care what she is! Ju—*lia*—!

[MRS. CUMMINGS *and* NONA *run in.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Why, Mother! What on earth is the matter? Are you sick?

GRANDMA. No, I'm not sick! I want Julia to come back into this room!

[MRS. CUMMINGS *looks bewildered,* NONA *stands faintly smiling.*]

HILDEGARDE. [*Very solemnly*] Mother, Julia is engaged. He knelt at her feet and he prayed her to—

NONA. Knelt at her feet! [*Laughs.*]

HILDEGARDE. He did! It was grand! It was—oh, Mother—it was—grand! He knelt at her feet and prayed her, and then they folded their tents like the Arabs and silently stole away.

GRANDMA. Bring her back here this minute.

HILDEGARDE. [*Always solemn*] They've gone out to get kissed.

GRANDMA. Ju—lia—!

[NONA *is still rocking with laughter.* MRS. CUMMINGS *is laughing, too, but scarcely knowing what to do.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Oh dear! Run, baby! Call Julia back. Grandma'll have a spell if you don't.

[HILDEGARDE *goes, none too swiftly.*]

She'll come in a minute, Mother.

GRANDMA. [*Her anger dropping as suddenly as it came, she begins to chuckle.*] I had to prompt him once.

NONA. Oh—poor Julia!

HILDEGARDE. [*Returning*] They hadn't gone out. They were standing close together in the vestibule.

MRS. CUMMINGS. Tell her—

HILDEGARDE. I did.

[*The* LOVERS *enter, very self-conscious.* JULIA *picks up the ball and bestows it on her grandmother's lap.*]

GRANDMA. Kiss me! [*To* THORNTON] You see, William, whatever's worth doing at all is worth doing right!

[*They grin at each other, an understanding established at last.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Mother, isn't it time for you to go to bed?

NONA. I know it's time for me to go home. [*She stands in front of* THORNTON.] Congrats in order, Bill?

THORNTON. [*Embarrassed, happy*] I'll say so!!

NONA. [*So blasé*] Love, and the world laughs with you—! [*Nods, smiles.*] Well, *I'm* going to do the right thing! Good-night, everybody! [*She goes.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Loudly*] Mother, isn't it time—

GRANDMA. I'm tired. I think I'll go to bed. Hildegarde—

[HILDEGARDE *reluctantly pushes the chair.* MRS. CUMMINGS *follows.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*At the door*] Julia—! William—

[JULIA *returns her mother's look, then turns a little away.* BILL *goes up stage and clasps her hand. Then he grins at* HILDEGARDE.]

THORNTON. Oh—must you go?

HILDEGARDE. [*Abandoning the chair*] Oh, I could stay awhile!

[*And there is no possible doubt that she would like to—.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Firmly*] No.

[*They go out.*]

GRANDMA. [*The ball of yarn drops again, but nobody sees it.*] This evening has been a good deal of a strain on me—

[HILDEGARDE *wheels her out, the yarn unwinding as they progress.* JULIA *and* THORNTON *are left alone on the stage. They look at the door, at each other; then their eyes turn to the ball of yarn.* THORNTON *picks it up, begins winding it with a sort of hurried determination. The thread is suddenly jerked. He takes a step or two up stage, as though to restore the ball to* GRANDMA. *He reaches a sudden decision, stops, turns back into the room and with an angry but deliberate gesture snaps the thread.*]

JULIA. Oh, Bill—

CURTAIN

CABBAGES AND KINGS[1]

BY

ROSE FYLEMAN

Rose Fyleman was educated at University College, Nottingham, England, in which city she now lives most of the time. For some years she was a school-teacher and subsequently studied singing at the Royal College of Music in London, also in Berlin and Paris. In 1903 she made her first appearance in London, at Queen's Hall; since then she has been engaged in public singing, teaching, and lecturing. She is editor of *The Children's Magazine* and *The Merry-Go-Round.* In 1916 Miss Fyleman became a regular contributor to *Punch*, where her dainty and graceful fancies are attracting the young in heart as well as the young in years. Her incomparable stories and poems for children have been assembled in published collections in England and America.

Cabbages and Kings is a fairy-tale play with a different twist. It concerns the romance of true-hearted lovers who, separated by unromantic cabbages, require the assistance of a fairy godmother to remove the obstacle. The gay little comedy preserves the bloom of fairyland and dream stuff and heightens the reality of make-believe. It is an interesting example to illustrate how, when something really good is written for the enjoyment of children in prose, in verse, or in music, it makes an appeal to grown-ups and wins their enthusiasm.

[1] From *Eight Little Plays for Children* by Rose Fyleman, copyright, 1925, by George H. Doran Company, Publishers. All rights reserved. Applications for the right of performing *Cabbages and Kings* must be made to LeRoy Phillips, 41 Winter Street, Boston, Mass.

CHARACTERS

King Corum
Queen Meldara, *his wife*
Ardita, *their daughter*
King Dorum
Toro, *his son, who loves Ardita*
Fairy Godmother
Peter Simple, *a peasant*
Official
King Corum's Servant
King Dorum's Servant
Page

CABBAGES AND KINGS

Scene I

A room in King Corum's *house. There is a window at back with long curtains; an entrance at each side.*

Ardita *and* Queen Meldara *are sitting sewing. Letters are brought in by a* Page.

Ardita. [*Glancing at them*] More catalogues, I suppose. Cabbages, cabbages, cabbages. I'm sick of them. I haven't had a new frock for ages and the palace wants fixing up so badly, and Dad *will* spend everything on those wretched cabbages. [*Goes to window.*] Look at them; fields and fields and fields of them, and all for the sake of producing one bigger than King Dorum can produce. It's absolutely idiotic.

Queen Meldara. My dear, you mustn't speak of your father like that. And, after all, cabbages are very wholesome food, and we give a great many to the poor.

Ardita. Oh, mother, you know perfectly well that everyone's fed up with them. We can't get people to take them away. And it's got to such a pitch that I'm sure there'll be a war between father and King Dorum presently, and I shall never, never be able to marry Toro. [*Weeps.*]

Queen Meldara. Well, there are plenty of other nice young men about, my dear, and perhaps in time your father and King Dorum will get tired of trying to beat one another's cabbages.

Ardita. Oh, no, they won't. They'll go on and on as long as that wretched agricultural show is held on No-Man's Common. And more and more money will be spent on gardeners, and experiments, and fertilizers, and in the end we shall all turn into cabbages. I often feel like one. [*She sits gazing gloomily in front*

of her, then after a moment she jumps up.] No, I won't stand it a minute longer. I shall ask my Fairy Godmother to help. What's the good of having a Fairy Godmother if she can't help you when you're in trouble?

QUEEN MELDARA. Oh, Ardita, you know your father doesn't like interference. I really think you'd better not. And besides, it's so dreadfully difficult talking in rhyme. I remember the strain at your christening. I shall go out, Ardita—I really can't . . .

[*Goes out.*]

ARDITA. I don't care. [*Stands up and recites solemnly.*]

I rub my ring, I rub my chain,
I turn me round and round again.
[*She makes her skirt into a "cheese."*]
Now I've made a fairy cheese,
Fairy lady, help me, please.

[FAIRY GODMOTHER *appears at window. She carries a bag and has a stick.*]

FAIRY GODMOTHER

Here I am, my dear, you see,
Tell me what you want of me.

ARDITA. [*Curtsies.*]

Dear Fairy Godmother, good day,
Your counsel and your help I pray.

[FAIRY GODMOTHER *comes round to side entrance—unless she is able to get through window.*]

FAIRY GODMOTHER. What is it, child? You seem distressed. Tell me your need. I'll do my best.

ARDITA

Oh, Godmother, how kind you are,
I'll tell you all. You see my fa——
My father's got the strangest craze
For growing cabbages . . .

Oh, dear Godmother, I simply can't keep up the rhyming. It's so frightfully hard to tell you about cabbages in poetry. Would blank verse do?

FAIRY GODMOTHER. Never mind, my child. As it happens, it's Poet Holiday in Fairyland today, and all the poets are shut up, so we'll talk in prose, too. Besides, I know all about this affair. They're perfectly absurd about their cabbages. Now let me see. When is this show?

ARDITA. In three months. They're just sowing the cabbage seed.

FAIRY GODMOTHER. [*Takes out tablets.*] Very well, dear child, I'll see to it.

ARDITA. Oh, Godmother, how good and clever you are. And shall I be able to marry my Toro?

FAIRY GODMOTHER. Of course, of course. He's a very nice young man, and I shall do what I can to help on the match. By the way, there's a young man coming up the garden at this moment.

ARDITA. [*Goes to window.*] Toro! Oh, how rash!

[TORO *puts his head in at window.*]

TORO. I wanted so badly to see you—I couldn't keep away. Pa anywhere about? [*Sees* FAIRY GODMOTHER.] Oh, I beg your pardon. How do you do, Madam?

FAIRY GODMOTHER. You don't remember me, Toro? I'm Dita's fairy godmother, you know. Met you last at her christening. You weren't quite so big then.

TORO. Delighted to meet you, Madam! Ardita's looking well—isn't she?

FAIRY GODMOTHER. Very well, I think.

ARDITA. Oh, goodness, Dad's coming. I can hear him talking in the passage. What *shall* we do?

FAIRY GODMOTHER. Oh, I'll see to that. Get into my chariot, both of you. It's behind the summer-house. You can tell the coachman to take you up for a ten-minutes' ride. I'll join you later. [*She stands in front of door right, making passes.*]

TORO.

Snibber, snabber, cockalorum
Sneeze until you're blue, King Corum.
[FAIRY GODMOTHER *hides behind window curtain.*]

[*Enter* KING CORUM *with* QUEEN MELDARA. *He sneezes continually at every word. He holds in his hand a packet labeled* "Best Cabbage Seed."]

KING CORUM. O dear, O dear . . . I believe I must have caught cold . . . my dear. . . . I thought . . . I heard . . . voices. Where's the gardener? . . . I've got some new . . . cabbage seed. Wonderful—now we'll beat that . . . conceited . . . O dear—O dear . . . I *have* got a cold.

QUEEN MELDARA. [*Anxiously*] I really think you ought to be in bed. You're not fit to be about.

KING CORUM. [*Puts packet on table.*] Came on . . . quite suddenly . . . I was all right . . . confound . . .

QUEEN MELDARA. If you don't take care of it you won't be fit to superintend the cabbage planting.

KING CORUM. [*Still sneezing*] Perhaps . . . I had better . . . Must get well for that. Gardeners so careless . . . Yes, yes . . . Eucalyptus . . . Come along . . .

[*They go out.*]

[FAIRY GODMOTHER *emerges from behind curtain.*]

FAIRY GODMOTHER. That's all right, now what am I going to do about this affair? [*Walks to and fro with finger to brow, thinking deeply. Sees cabbage seed on table.*] Ah, I have an idea. Yes, I've got it. Just a few preparations. [*She pulls cloak out of her bag and puts it on, also a pair of spectacles, and with a pencil from her pocket makes a few lines on her face in front of a mirror.*] There, that's done it. [*To audience*] How's that? Pretty good, don't you think? And now I must be getting off to look for a suitable person. Where are those two children? They ought to be back. [*Looks out of window.*] Hi, come down, you two. You've been out long enough. Oh, here they come!

[*Enter* TORO *and* ARDITA.]

[FAIRY GODMOTHER *hobbles with stick.*]

TORO. Good morrow, good Gossip. Can I be of any assistance to a poor old dame? Do you require any help in getting over a stile, for instance? I am a most worthy young man. Pray allow me. [*Offers arm.*]

FAIRY GODMOTHER. You're an impudent rascal. However, I'll do my best to help the two of you. You're quite a pretty pair.

ARDITA. Oh, godmother, how will you do it?

FAIRY GODMOTHER. You'll know in good time. But first of all, I must bewitch some of this cabbage seed. [*She empties some of it into her hand and walks round, waving her arms and singing to the tune of* "John Peel."]

With a leeny, loony, larny, lay,
Grow little seed as fast as you may,
Grow you by night, and grow you by day,
With a leeny, a loony, larny!

[*The other two take hands and join in the song, and they finally all go out, dancing and singing.*]

ALL.

With a sawny, soony, sarny, see,
All will be well for you and me,
Grow little seed as fast as can be,
With a sawny, a soony, sarny!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Three months later. Outside the Cabbage Tent at the show on No-Man's Common.

The tent can be indicated by curtains across the back with a large card on which is printed "Cabbages." *An* OFFICIAL *sits at a table on one side of the opening of the tent. There is another table at the other side.*

[*Enter* KING DORUM *left, with his son, and attendant carrying large box marked*

"DORUM R. FRAGILE."]

[*The* OFFICIAL *rises and salutes.*]

KING DORUM. Page, bring forward the Cabbage Box.

OFFICIAL. [*Pleasantly*] It looks as if your Majesty means to beat all records this year.

KING DORUM. Yes, yes. We've done quite nicely, I think. I've taken a lot of trouble, a lot of trouble. Nothing can be done without trouble, my good man. Even kings have to take trouble, you know.

OFFICIAL. Will your Majesty kindly fill up the form? Or shall I give it to one of your Majesty's retainers?

KING DORUM. [*Fussily*] No, no. I will do it myself. I always prefer to do things myself. I believe that a monarch should show his people a good example by doing things himself. I make a point of it. I even fill my own fountain pen myself. Ha, ha! Give me the papers.

[*He goes to table left and begins to fill in the papers. There is no ink in his fountain pen. He is busy shaking it as quietly as possible when* KING CORUM *enters, right, with* QUEEN MELDARA, PRINCESS ARDITA, *and a retainer bearing a large basket marked*

"CORUM R. WITH CARE."

KING CORUM *stands glancing at the back of* KING DORUM. TORO *and* ARDITA *exchange glances.* QUEEN MELDARA *looks anxious; the* OFFICIAL, *uncomfortable. He salutes.*]

OFFICIAL. Good morning, your Majesty.

[KING DORUM *looks around. The* Kings *bow distantly.* KING DORUM *resumes his efforts with pen.*]

OFFICIAL. Your Majesty has brought your consignment of cabbages, I see. Has your Majesty had a successful season?

KING CORUM. [*Looking at* KING DORUM'S *box*] Excellent, excellent, never better.

OFFICIAL. Will your Majesty fill in the papers?

KING CORUM. Certainly.

[KING CORUM *goes to table, right, and begins to fill in papers.* KING DORUM *is still in difficulties.* TORO *throws a flower across to* ARDITA.]

QUEEN MELDARA. Oh, Dita, *do* be careful. You know how angry your father would be if he saw you.

KING CORUM. [*Watches* KING DORUM, *who is still struggling with his pen. Then, sarcastically*] I hope your Majesty will have more success with your Majesty's cabbages than your Majesty appears to be having with your Majesty's fountain pen.

KING DORUM. [*Angrily*] I hope your Majesty's ability to grow cabbages is greater than your Majesty's ability to mind your Majesty's own business. Otherwise, I fear your Majesty may find yourself in a foolish position.

KING CORUM. [*Hand on sword*] Sir!

KING DORUM. [*Hand on sword*] Sir!

[QUEEN MELDARA *comes anxiously forward.*]

QUEEN MELDARA. [*Nervously*] Corum, dear, I think the horses are waiting, and there's a hot lunch. Are you ready?

[*Enter* PETER SIMPLE, *carrying an enormous basket labeled* "PETER SIMPUL. KABBIDGE."]

PETER SIMPLE. Be this the cabbage tent?

OFFICIAL. Yes, my man.

PETER SIMPLE. [*Looking round at them all*] I've brought a cabbage. [*To* KING DORUM] Be you ticket collector?

KING DORUM. Certainly not.

[KING CORUM *smiles.*]

PETER SIMPLE. No offense meant. [*To* KING CORUM] Be *you* ticket collector?

KING CORUM. This is the ticket collector, my good man.

[*Motioning toward the* OFFICIAL.]

PETER SIMPLE. Thank you. It's a rare cabbage.

ARDITA. [*Coming forward*] How interesting! Is that it?

PETER SIMPLE. Yes. Here it be. It's took some getting here. I never see such a cabbage. It's near as big as my cottage. My old woman made me bring 'un here. I'd never 'a' thought on it myself.

[*The* Kings *both come forward as* PETER SIMPLE *unpacks the basket. The cabbage could be made of green paper, but it need not be taken out of the hamper.*]

PETER SIMPLE. [*Proudly*] There 'un be!

[*The* Kings *both fall back in amazement.*]

TORO. [*Aside to* ARDITA] That's done it!

QUEEN MELDARA. My good man, how came you to grow such an enormous cabbage?

PETER SIMPLE. I'm sure I dunno. The seed was given me by an old woman, a queer old body who dropped in one day for a drink o' milk. It's a rare cabbage, bain't it?

TORO. [*Aside*] Good old Fairy Godmother.

KING DORUM. He's beaten us, Corum.

KING CORUM. Yes, I think there's no doubt about that. [*Swallows hard. To* PETER SIMPLE] My congratulations, my brave fellow, on your splendid achievement.

PETER SIMPLE. Nay, sir, I'm only a simple farmer. Any fool can grow a cabbage!

[*The* Kings *look away, embarrassed.*]

PETER SIMPLE. Not but what I'll be glad if I get the prize—if I do get it, that is. It would be nowt to great gentlemen like you, you wouldn't understand, but it means a deal to me. My wife'll be fine and pleased if I win it.

OFFICIAL. Kindly fill in the form.

PETER SIMPLE. Nay, but I dunno how to write.

KING DORUM. Allow me. [*Takes paper.*]

KING CORUM. [*Smiling to* DORUM] Pray, use my pen.

KING DORUM. Thank you, Corum. [*He fills in paper, talking in background to* KING CORUM.]

TORO. Queen Meldara, pray allow me to take you to the refreshment tent to have an ice. Princess Ardita, permit me. [*Offers arm to* QUEEN MELDARA.]

[KING DORUM *hands paper to* PETER SIMPLE.]

PETER SIMPLE. Thank you kindly, sir.

KING CORUM. [*To* KING DORUM] Shall we take a stroll?

[*They go out arm in arm.*]

OFFICIAL. Do you know who those gentlemen are?

PETER SIMPLE. No.

OFFICIAL. King Dorum and King Corum!

PETER SIMPLE. [*Stands with hands held up in astonishment.*] Kings! Kings! [*He runs left to look after them and comes back, still gasping.*] Kings! Oh, why didn't I bring my old woman!

CURTAIN

A FOOL OF A MAN

BY

EDWARD FINNEGAN

Edward Finnegan's birthplace is his present home, Medford, Massachusetts, where he is on the English staff of the Medford High School. While a student at Boston College he was intensely interested in the English drama and acted Shakespearian parts. His first published play, *The Prodigal Son*, a Biblical play, was used during an entire winter season at St. Mary's Theater, Boston, and is now widely presented. *Danny Boy*, a study of modern Irish-American life, is the best known of Mr. Finnegan's plays.

A Fool of a Man is an excellent comedy of character. This picture of suburban domesticity, after thirty-five years of monotonous married contentment, is a keen observation of human nature in which youth and age, with their outlook on life, are finely contrasted. Many readers are now looking to plays in place of fiction for entertainment and study. To such the stage directions of convention, brief and without literary style, are inadequate. Accordingly, some current published plays have detailed descriptions of people, scenes, and action to accompany the dialogue,—a tendency which is noticeable in *A Fool of a Man.*

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CHARACTERS

Horace Bundy
Mrs. Bundy
Eddie

A FOOL OF A MAN

SCENE: *Room at the Bundys'.*

TIME: *Five-thirty o'clock of a winter afternoon.*

You are walking into the combination living-room and dining-room of MR. *and* MRS. HORACE BUNDY. *Small, comfortable, and that's all. The door from the outer hall is on the right. Another door, center, leads to the rest of the apartment, with which you are not concerned. In the left wall, somewhat to the rear, is an attractively-curtained window. I'll have you understand that* MRS. BUNDY *spent a long time in finding the exact shade of marquisette for those curtains. No old cheap stuff for her. A bird cage hangs at the window, and in it a fluttering canary.*

Down left is a fireplace. Since this is an apartment, the fireplace is probably an imitation; but, at any rate, it contains a gas log which glows brightly, trying hard to imitate a real, live hunk of wood. But it lacks the soul. In front of the fireplace is a nice easy-chair and a dinky floor lamp. Fine place to read, or talk to your girl.

There is a round table, center, partly set for two. A pretty desk is down right. On this is a telephone. Pictures of dumb-looking people and scenes decorate the walls; and scattered about the room are the odds and ends of thirty-five years of married life.

Let me tell you about the Bundys. There are only two of them. He calls her mamma, and is just as obedient as your old dog. The world says they're happily married. Right. Happy, even after the company's gone, when most couples prepare for war.

HORACE (*doddering old name, eh?*) *is sixty. He wears soft leather shoes and stand-up collars, with a four-in-hand hitch. Unless you're a statesman, such a rig-up is a sure sign of respectable mediocrity. That's* HORACE. *Too respectable to amount to a row of shucks.*

MRS. BUNDY (*you mustn't call her mamma;* HORACE *might get mad—although, on second thought, I doubt it*) *is inclining to stoutness. She had money once and never got over it. She gave it all up to take the matrimonial dive with* HORACE, *who never had a red, and never will. Bemoaned her fate, ever since. If she were nineteen again, and the world to pick from, she'd take* HORACE. *Women are funny that way.*

Here they come.

[HORACE BUNDY *enters from hall wearing hat, overcoat, and gloves. At the same instant* MRS. HORACE BUNDY *comes charging in from center, holding a casserole with both hands and two napkins with her teeth. She speaks quite unintelligibly.*]

MRS. BUNDY. Mm-rr-aah?

HORACE. [*Absently*] I believe so, my dear.

MRS. BUNDY. [*Depositing casserole on table, and removing napkins*] Well, where is it?

HORACE. [*After a moment of preoccupation*] Where is what?

MRS. BUNDY. The paper.

HORACE. Oh. [*Fumbling in his overcoat pockets*] I'm afraid I've forgotten it. [*Moves across to fireplace.*]

MRS. BUNDY. Horace Bundy, you *knew* I'd be waiting to read about Mrs. Martin's reception! It's bad enough, goodness knows, not to be with my old friends; but to be denied even reading about them is unbearable.

HORACE. I'm sorry, mamma. Perhaps I can get you a paper later.

MRS. BUNDY. [*Sweetly, but you can hear the ice tinkle*] I'm *sure* you can. Directly after dinner.

[*He nods, hands in pockets, staring into fire.*]

MRS. BUNDY. Won't you stay awhile?

HORACE. [*Coming out of his trance*] Er—oh—

[*She helps him take off his overcoat.*]

MRS. BUNDY. Your muffler—where is it?

HORACE. [*Feeling his neck helplessly*] It isn't there, is it, mamma.

[MRS. BUNDY *registers feminine sarcasm by heaving a sigh, accompanied by a gentle tapping of the right foot.*]

I—I must have left it.

MRS. BUNDY. And it down to zero! [*She takes his hat off his head and goes out center with the hat and coat, talking all the while.*] Honestly, I never saw the beat of you. A brand-new woolen muffler for a man with a weak throat, and he walks off without it! [*Emerging again*] Or did it fall off you? You wouldn't know the difference. It's a wonder to me you don't lose yourself. I'll have to go down to the office after this and lead you home by the hand, if I want to keep what little husband I have left—and heaven knows that's little enough. [*Patting his shoulder*] Old stick-in-the-mud. Come on, now. As Eddie says, snap out of it. Forget business, and come have dinner. [*Leads him to table; tucks napkin under his chin.*] Got something nice. Your old favorite: scalloped 'taters. [*Uncovering dish*] Smell.

HORACE. [*Smiling wanly*] There's no one to beat you on scalloped 'taters, mamma.

MRS. BUNDY. Heavenly days, take off your gloves! They won't burn you.

[*He removes his gloves shamefacedly, tucking them into his vest pocket. She has dished him out a generous helping of potatoes. Then one for herself. There's nothing wrong with* MRS. BUNDY'S *appetite.*]

MRS. BUNDY. [*Between bites*] Hoddy, what do you think: it's a sure thing between Eddie and Eileen!

HORACE. Marry?

MRS. BUNDY. M-mm. She was here, this afternoon. Thank heaven, my niece is getting a fine young man. [*He is absently stabbing a portion of potato.* MRS. BUNDY *speaks louder, as though looking for an argument.*] I said *a fine young man.*

HORACE. A fine young man, yes.

MRS. BUNDY. *Eddie* won't stay in one rut all his life. [*She's rather clever with the rapier.*] Of course, it's a great chance Eileen's taking, marrying a man of no social standing. Many

women have done so, to their sorrow. [*Flicked him that time.*] But [*Sighing*] girls will be fools.

HORACE. [*Miles away*] Yes.

MRS. BUNDY. [*Sharply*] What?

[*He makes a shy little gesture, signifying "I didn't mean anything."*]

HORACE. Has Eddie asked Eileen?

MRS. BUNDY. Not yet; but he will. Eileen has every indication that the question will be popped.

HORACE. She has?

MRS. BUNDY. She has. A woman always knows. [*Louder*] *A woman always knows.*

[*Again the shy little gesture. No argument there.*] [*With a long sigh over the chances her sex takes*] I hope she'll be happy.

HORACE. Bright young feller. Firm thinks a lot of him.

MRS. BUNDY. They thought a lot of *you*, at his age.

[*He looks down at his plate.*]

I figured then you'd go far. I loved to picture you as a gorgeous rocket with its fuse sizzing, ready to soar into the sky and burst on a delighted and gaping world. But—

HORACE. The fuse went out.

MRS. BUNDY. [*Her hands going across the table, to pat his*] Well, Hoddikens, we've been happy. Married thirty-five years and not tired of each other yet. That's a record in the apartment district. Though goodness knows, if you'd been successful, we'd have lots of nice things now. I sometimes wish I hadn't seen money in girlhood. I've had my share of sorrows, but I'll never get over that loss. [*Pause, meaning she'll do her best to put up with it.*] Eat your 'taters.

HORACE. I don't believe I care for any.

MRS. BUNDY. Hoddy, you're ill!

HORACE. [*Pushing away his plate, and removing napkin*] No, mamma, I'm not; but I feel as though I were.

MRS. BUNDY. [*Crossing in back of him, kneels on his left*] Why, your hands are as cold as ice! You poor old thing. There, there, don't shiver so. Tell mamma all about it.

HORACE. Oh dear; oh dear me!

MRS. BUNDY. Something go wrong at the office?

HORACE. Very wrong, mamma.

MRS. BUNDY. Old Dodson speak sharply to you again?

HORACE. Mr. Dodson was very nice about it. Smiled. Mr. Wright smiled. Then they told me—oh, it's too terrible!

MRS. BUNDY. [*Catching his terror*] Hoddy, you haven't—don't tell me you've lost your job! Are you nodding your head, or shaking it? Which?

HORACE. Nodding. Nodding. I've lost—[*The rest dies out in a most wretched sound.*]

MRS. BUNDY. Heaven help us now! [*Rising in despair*] How did it happen?

HORACE. I can't speak, mamma. I'm so upset.

MRS. BUNDY. You haven't been investing the firm's money in oil, have you, Hoddy?

HORACE. No, mamma.

MRS. BUNDY. Or making ogles at the stenographer?

HORACE. Oh, mamma!

MRS. BUNDY. Then if you've been so beautifully honest, how did it happen?

HORACE. I was too honest. So honest—they promoted me! [*The last in a wail*]

MRS. BUNDY. Pro—*promoted* you! [*Commencing to laugh hysterically*] Promoted you!

HORACE. It's too awful to think about!

[*She laughs again, more wildly. His head is in his hands.*]

MRS. BUNDY. [*Shaking him by the shoulders*] Your fuse, Hoddy! It was sizzing all these years! [*Pulling him to his feet. He's limp all over.*] You old darling! And me so cross with you! Hoddy dear, you'll forgive mamma? I'll never speak a sharp word

to you as long as I live. [*Kissing him*] There! [*Looking at him fondly*] Dear old Hoddy, I knew it was in you.

[*He crosses left, a pitiable, shrinking figure.*]

What have they made you, boy,—head clerk?

HORACE. [*Staring out window*] I'm a—I'm a—[*Gulping*] partner.

MRS. BUNDY. Hoddy—never!

HORACE. [*In a heartbroken wail*] Yes, I am!

MRS. BUNDY. Partner in the firm of Dodson and Wright! [*Rushing up to him, the years falling away from her*] Hoddy, waltz me! Waltz me, like you used to!

[*He flounders around with her. Then he gives it up and wanders about, fluttering his hands helplessly.*]

Now I can have all the things I've missed!

[*He is staring out window again.*]

You don't seem very enthused.

HORACE. [*Sadly*] I'll never have it, now.

MRS. BUNDY. Have what?

HORACE. That little garden.

MRS. BUNDY. Why, of course you can. And a mansion to go with it.

HORACE. It won't be the same little garden I'd planned on. And the cottage—I was going to buy that little place out in the country, and retire. [*Coming down left center*] Can't retire now.

MRS. BUNDY. Heavenly days! Here's a man made partner in one of the biggest firms in town, and all he does is dream of a cottage and a garden! You'd look nice, shuffling around with a hoe in your hand.

HORACE. [*Quietly*] Don't, mamma.

MRS. BUNDY. Wake up, Hoddy. You're one of the big bugs now. Think of the problems you'll settle.

[*He does, and writhes.*]

Sitting at a big polished table, with papers in front of you—[*His face is twisted with pain. She sails up to the center door.*] I'm

going to make a list of the things I'll need. The wife of Horace Bundy, of Dodson, Wright, and Bundy, must dress the part. Oh, yes, she must—Partner!

[*Out she goes. The canary chirps. Or we'll imagine he did, anyway, because* HORACE *turns and goes up to the cage.*]

HORACE. Well, old yellow jacket, just a dream. Too bad, old boy. We were to have such fine times, you and I. Going to hang your cage from a branch, weren't we, and let you sing to the flowers. Afraid it can't be, ole feller. You and I have got to stay cooped up. [*He wanders about, touching things here and there aimlessly. His hand comes to rest on the phone. It is an omen. He is making up his mind. Does he dare? Yes, sir; he's taken off the receiver.*] Winchester 0938. Yes. [*His courage is oozing out through the palms of his hands. He puts the phone down. He walks away. The phone rings. His breath goes out of his body at the sound. He comes back slowly and takes up the receiver.*] Yes. I was calling that number. [*Pause.*] Mr. Dodson? This is Bundy. [*Pause.*] Am I celebrating the good news? Well—[*Laughs weakly.*] Yes, yes, of course, it's very fine. My chance, at last, yes. [*Don't get sidetracked, now, Horace.*] Mrs. Bundy? Quite beside herself with joy. But [*Ah, now he's coming to it!*] I want to say, Mr. Dodson,—

[MRS. BUNDY *enters, list in hand. Catching the name of Dodson, she pauses, near center door. He does not see her.*]

I want to say, Mr. Dodson, that I can't take it. I'm afraid of it, Mr. Dodson. Yes, I am. [*Pause.*] I know it sounds foolish, but won't you please let me resign?

[*The list flutters from* MRS. BUNDY'S *hand to the floor. Her hopes come down with a smash.*]

I wouldn't make a good partner. I'm scared of the bigness of the thing. Do you understand, sir? [*Pause.*] I knew you would. [*Pause.*] My old position—clerk—just the same? Thank you. No need for a written resignation? I see. Thank you—and good-

night. [*He puts down the receiver with such relief on his face as was never seen on mortal man before.*]

[MRS. BUNDY *comes down center. She is a tragic figure—or a comic one.*]

MRS. BUNDY. [*Softly, but oh, so terribly*] The biggest chance in Boston—and you let it trickle through your fingers!

HORACE. I had to, mamma. I had to.

MRS. BUNDY. Had to—fiddlesticks! An idiot, a half-wit, couldn't do worse. What must Dodson think of you? What will my friends think? Why, I'll be the laughing-stock of the town! They'll say I'm married to a moron. That's it, a moron!

HORACE. Now, mamma—[*He starts to rise.*]

MRS. BUNDY. Oh, why did you do it? [*Throwing out her hands*] Why?

[*He sinks back.*]

HORACE. I wanted that garden.

MRS. BUNDY. Garden, indeed! You prefer an old flower bed to my happiness.

HORACE. No, mamma; no, indeed, I don't. [*Pathetically earnest*] It isn't the garden alone; it's what it represents: peace. Puttering around, with your life's work done. What's a partnership to that?

MRS. BUNDY. Horace Bundy, you're crazy.

HORACE. [*Gently*] Mamma, I'm not.

MRS. BUNDY. Then why did you do it?

HORACE. I wanted—

MRS. BUNDY. Don't you dare say *peace* again! Do you think an old shack of a cottage and a garden swimming with potato bugs mean peace for me?

HORACE. [*Patiently*] Mamma, there aren't any potato bugs in a flower garden.

MRS. BUNDY. Now stop poking fun! Let me tell you, Horace Bundy, love in a cottage may be heaven for newly-weds, but it's a fool's paradise for an old woman. [*I guess she's crying.*] Papa always said, "You'll be sorry if you marry that fool." He called

you a fool. Papa was a good fortune-teller. But I was young and foolish, and married you because you wore such lovely plug hats. Look at me now—married to a hat, with nothing inside. Don't say a word! Horace Bundy, you're a fool of a man, if there ever was one. [*She is at the center door now.*] You can have your old garden, and hoe your way to China—but you'll go without me!

[*Bang goes the door. Well, she's annihilated* HORACE. *He just sits. Lusty knock at the hall door. Wearily he rises and opens it.*]

[EDDIE *breezes in.*]

EDDIE. [*Seizing* HORACE'S *hand*] Congratulations, Mr. Bundy! Your promotion, you know. By George, sir, it's fine!

HORACE. Sit down, Eddie. [*Indicating chair by fireplace*]

EDDIE. Glad to. Darned cold, outside. [*Taking off his overcoat and gloves; warms hands at log. You'd like* EDDIE. *He's what the girls call an awfully nice boy.*] Say, it's splendid, Mr. Bundy. After all these years. Time the firm woke up.

HORACE. They slept a little too long, Eddie. [*He takes a chair from the table and sits center.*]

EDDIE. You'll keep 'em prodded, from now on. We poor devils in the outside office will have to toe the mark. Be merciful, though; remember your old pals. [*Laughs.*] Well, once to every man, eh, Mr. Bundy? Don't I wish I were in your shoes!

HORACE. What would you do?

EDDIE. Ask Eileen to marry me, right off. Then I'd lick the world.

HORACE. Youth can always lick the world. It's the old men who are afraid.

EDDIE. If I had your chance!

HORACE. If I had your youth!

EDDIE. When do they put your name on the door?

HORACE. They're not going to, Eddie.

EDDIE. Not—?

HORACE. I've resigned.

EDDIE. Oh. [*A pause.*] You'll excuse me, sir, for bursting in here, won't you?

HORACE. Why, sure. [*Another pause.* EDDIE *doesn't know what to say.*] You're thinking me an old fool.

EDDIE. Not at all, sir.

HORACE. That's very polite of you; but you do think so, just the same.

EDDIE. Well, sir, I admit I can't see why you did it. A partnership is every business man's dream.

HORACE. It was mine. And when the chance came, I threw it away. [*A pause.*] Eddie, if you were offered a partnership, you'd take it?

EDDIE. Take it? I'd grab it so fast they'd think I was lightning.

HORACE. You wouldn't worry about responsibilities?

EDDIE. Not so long as the old bean holds out, and I can jump into a cold tub without stopping to think about it.

HORACE. How old are you, Eddie?

EDDIE. Twenty-two.

HORACE. That's a grand age. [*He is looking back through the years.*] Never a ghost of fear, at twenty-two. What a pity we can't have all life's experience then!

EDDIE. I'd rather not. It's so much fun, finding out things. Like playing a game with Old Man World. He gives you a wallop —floors you, maybe—but you climb up on your feet and hand him one back. That's where the fun comes in.

HORACE. Think I could hand the world a wallop—now?

EDDIE. Why, with your experience—

HORACE. [*Shaking head*] No good, when the sap's gone out of you. [*Almost shyly*] Eddie, you're a second edition of me. I had the same thoughts when I was twenty-two, and started clerking. Did when I was thirty-two, and still clerking. At forty, I wasn't thinking quite the same. Something was leaving me, Eddie; something I could never get back. Pep, you boys call it. That's as good a name as any. I commenced to forget ambition; commenced to be contented. Bad sign, my boy; you're never contented when

you're ambitious. At fifty, life became—well, just one day after another. I stopped thinking. Didn't want to think. I was *afraid.*

EDDIE. Of what, sir?

HORACE. New responsibilities. You won't understand—now. [*It's plain that* EDDIE *doesn't.*] So I stayed where I was, on the bottom rung of the ladder, while others climbed up over my shoulders. [*Pause.*] Today, my chance came. Too late.

EDDIE. Are you sure, sir? That pep you speak of, isn't it just sleeping somewhere inside you?

HORACE. Eddie, when you're young, you can look the world in the face; and if it hits you, you aren't afraid to hit back. That's you. But a time comes when you don't hit back. You just take it —smack! That's me. No use then having something big offered you. Been kept waiting too long. The experience is there, but you've paid it out in pep. There's the story behind half the failures in life.

EDDIE. It's a darned shame, sir.

HORACE. Way of the world, my boy. But here, you don't want to be listening to old men's talk. How's Eileen?

EDDIE. [*Jumping up*] Great! [*He crosses center.*]

HORACE. Affect you that way, does it?

EDDIE. Well—[*Laughs; crosses right.*]

HORACE. [*Smiling*] Once to every man, Eddie.

EDDIE. [*Suddenly*] Would you?

HORACE. Sure I would. Now. [*Rising*] While you're—youth. While you're unafraid. Don't wait, boy, or the chance may come too late. [*His hand on* EDDIE'S *shoulder*] That's the advice of a fool of a man.

EDDIE. I'll take it! Won't stop to go over to Eileen's. Might get afraid on the way. I'll telephone.

HORACE. Youth rides a swift steed.

EDDIE. Back Bay 2140. [*You don't see* EDDIE *putting down the phone and walking away. No, sir; he's got a death grip on it.*] Is this the daughter of the house? This is Eddie. Will you marry me, Eileen? You might as well say Yes, 'cause I'll pester you till

I die, and afterward come back and ha'nt yer. Eileen, dost thou say "I will"? [*His face breaks out into smiles. He puts down phone.*] She dost!

HORACE. [*Clapping his hands noiselessly*] Very good, Eddie.

EDDIE. [*Shouting*] Look out, world! I'm going to sock you in the eye!

HORACE. Do it now.

EDDIE. [*Climbing into his overcoat*] I will, sir! I'll start in by asking Dodson for a raise. If he doesn't come across, I'll laugh at him and tell him he's losing the best thing that ever came down the pike.

HORACE. He won't believe you, Eddie; but you mustn't mind. He's an old man looking at life through smoked glasses. You go ahead—youth.

EDDIE. [*Setting his hat at a cocky angle*] Right! [*Holding out his hand*] And now good-night, Mr. Bundy,—and thank you!

HORACE. What for?

EDDIE. Eileen. [*He runs across to the right door.*]

HORACE. Oh, Eddie—

EDDIE. [*Turning*] Yes, Mr. Bundy?

HORACE. Is that a paper sticking out of your pocket?

EDDIE. [*Producing a folded newspaper*] Care for it?

HORACE. If you've read—

EDDIE. [*Tossing it to him*] Take 'er away. Good-night, sir!

[*He's out the door like a shot. You can hear him whistling as he jumps the stairs, three at a time.* HORACE *unfolds, then folds, the paper nervously. After a moment of agitated thought, he goes up to the center door. He raps gently; listens.*]

HORACE. [*Softly*] Mamma. [*Pause; no answer.*] Mamma, I've brought you the paper. [*He listens hopefully.*] All about Mrs. Martin's reception. At least, I think it's all about Mrs. Martin's reception. [*Pause.*] Mrs. Martin's reception, mamma.

MRS. BUNDY. [*That is, it's her tearful voice that you hear, within.*] Oh, go away!

HORACE. [*Dutifully*] Yes, mamma. [*He comes down center; looks wretchedly at the table, then back at the door. Well, he's going to try again: his faltering steps are taking him to the door.*] Mamma, [*Pause.*] I'm hungry. [*No answer. His shoulders rise in a sigh; he falters down center. There he stands, a forlorn figure.*]

[*After a moment,* MRS. BUNDY *enters, drying her eyes. When she speaks, the words rush out of her in a sort of wail.*]

MRS. BUNDY. Oh, don't stand there like that, with your shoulders sagging! [*Handkerchief to her eyes*] You'd think you'd lost your best friend.

HORACE. I have.

MRS. BUNDY. Well, [*Sniffs*] don't look so—so lugubrious about it. It's like having cold water thrown down my back. Oh, ple-ease don't shiver like that!

HORACE. It's rather chilly.

MRS. BUNDY. Why, a person could roast an ox here! You're catching cold, that's what it is. I'll have you sick on my hands next, to complete my misery.

HORACE. I wouldn't be much loss, mamma.

MRS. BUNDY. How can you talk that way! If anything happened to you, what would I do? [*Throwing out her hands*] I say, what would I do? Who wants to be bothered with an old married widow? I'd land up in the poorhouse, that's where I'd land. And the Lord knows what would become of me there, with you not around to share it with me!

[*He holds out the paper shyly. She takes it, glancing at the heading.*]

It's this morning's! Oh, if you live to be ninety, you'll never know A from B!

HORACE. No, mamma.

MRS. BUNDY. Oh, don't stand there with that expression on your face! You'd think I didn't give you enough to eat.

HORACE. [*Hopefully*] You do, mamma. [*He is edging toward the table.*] I could live on your 'scalloped 'taters. Die on them!

MRS. BUNDY. [*Looking at him doubtfully*] You're not very complimentary.

HORACE. [*Sampling one*] They're lovely! Um!

[*They are now both sinking into their former places at the table.*]

MRS. BUNDY. You swallow as if your mouth were full of straw.

HORACE. I—I'm making them go down slowly, mamma, so the taste will linger. [*He is faintly smiling. A look at* MRS. BUNDY, *and his brightness fades. Up go his shoulders in a sigh.*] Oh dear!

MRS. BUNDY. Don't do that!

HORACE. I can't help it. Oh dear!

MRS. BUNDY. [*Laying down her fork, and applying her handkerchief*] Now you're breaking me all up again. I say you're breaking me all up again! Just when I was becoming reconciled to the blow. [*They both sigh together.*] Ah, dear! I've gone through all the sorrows of a woman's lifetime tonight. You hauled me up to the heights, and then, like that—[*Snapping her fingers*] dropped me in the mud. I said in the mud.

HORACE. [*Rising and going to her*] Poor little mamma!

MRS. BUNDY. Your hands—so cold! [*She forgets all about her terrible sorrow.*] You *must* be sick!

HORACE. [*His hand on his heart*] I am, mamma: here.

MRS. BUNDY. [*All sympathy*] Hoddy!

HORACE. Sick because I've made you feel so badly. You're right; I *am* a fool of a man. All my life. Shilly-shally. No push; no go ahead. You married me because I looked as if I might amount to something. [*With all the determination of which he is capable*] I'm going to try, for the last time! [*He crosses suddenly to the phone; picks it up.*]

HORACE. Winchester 0938. Pardon, Miss, I didn't mean to speak so gruffly.

[MRS. BUNDY *is looking at him in wide-eyed wonder.*] Mr. Dodson? Ah—ah—this is Bundy. Me. Bundy. Yes, Bundy. Mr. Dodson, I've been thinking—yes, I've been thinking it over

—and [*Great beads of perspiration are on his forehead. And why not? He is throwing away his life.*] and I'll take—I'll take—I say, I'll take—

MRS. BUNDY. [*Rushing forward and seizing the phone out of his grasp*] He says he'll take *cold* if he goes to work in the morning. Yes, sore throat. Forgot his muffler. [*Pause.*] He may have the day off? That is nice of you, Mr. Dodson. I must take care of my husband, you know. Good men come scarce. I say good men come scarce. Good-night. [*She puts down the phone. They both look at each other.*]

HORACE. *Good* men—?

MRS. BUNDY. [*Coming slowly toward him; puts her hands on his shoulders.*] I can't let you, boy; I just can't. While you were talking to him, I saw what was on your face. Agony.

[*He makes a gentle, murmured remonstrance.*]

You'd be willing. Of course, dear. Willing to give up everything—for me. That's what makes you a good man, Hoddy. I'm selfish, but [*Shaking her head slowly*] not that selfish.

HORACE. But, mamma, you said—

MRS. BUNDY. Oh, I know. I've been a blind old bat. Yes, I have. Couldn't see what was as plain as the nose on my face. Poor old foolish me! Searching for happiness, and all the while we've *had* happiness because we've been just—just *folks*. Let the old partnership go hang. If you had taken it, we'd have to dress up our whole lives. We're a bit too old for that, Hoddy.

HORACE. Why, mamma, you're still what I used to call you: "M. G." Don't you remember, "M. G.": "My Girl"?

MRS. BUNDY. [*Smiling*] Yes, I know, Hoddy; but at our time of life, slippers and a fireplace—

[*They are before the fireplace. He sits; she sinks on the hassock beside his chair. Their hands clasp; they look into the red glow in silence.*]

HORACE. [*Oh, so peacefully!*] You were right, mamma, about Eddie and Eileen. He's asked her.

MRS. BUNDY. Happy children!

HORACE. Eddie's fuse is sizzing. He'll bump the stars, mamma; and she with him.

MRS. BUNDY. Well, let them. [*Her head against his shoulder*] It's lots nicer, close to the ground.

SLOW CURTAIN

DAWN[1]

BY

PERCIVAL WILDE

With acknowledgments to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Of the playwrights who have contributed to the high prestige of the Little Theater in America, Percival Wilde has the distinction of having had more of his plays produced by them, with more productions of the plays, than any other author. His first short story, published in 1912, elicited so many requests for dramatic rights that he dramatized it himself. This, his first one-act play, was professionally produced over one thousand times. More than sixty short pieces for the stage have followed,—tragedy, comedy, farce, fantasy, travesty,—usually written with the Little Theater movement in mind. Percival Wilde has also served the drama by practically demonstrating the technique of the particular art with which he is identified; his *Craftsmanship of the One-Act Play* is the recognized textbook for students and aspirants.

Dawn is unusual; a new sort of thriller—the suspense ending with a most audacious surprise. Of the play, Mr. Wilde writes: "In 1913 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's story *How It Happened* appeared in an English magazine. The ending of the story, the revelation that the teller of it was dead and did not realize it, fascinated me and I devised a totally different story, intended for the stage, which built up to a similar climax. Sir Arthur kindly allowed me to use two lines from his story, and I wrote the play in 1914."

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17096

CHARACTERS

The Doctor
The Woman
The Man
A Child

DAWN

SCENE: *A mining district.*

TIME: *A winter morning just before dawn.*

A rough shack, one story in height. At the rear is the main door, bolted. At the left of the door is a window, through which falling snow can be seen. Another door, at the right, leads into the sleeping-room.

A stove against the right wall and a cupboard near it are the principal objects of interest. There are two or three rickety chairs, and a deal table covered with a soiled red cloth. A scrap of dilapidated carpet conceals part of the floor. This and a cheap chromo on the left wall are the only attempts at ornamentation.

At the rise of the curtain the woman, MOLLY, *is discovered, sitting at the window. There is very little light outside, and she has a burning kerosene lamp next to her. She is under thirty and shabbily dressed. Suddenly she starts, rises. There is a knock at the door.*

DOCTOR. [*Outside*] Let me in.

WOMAN. [*With great nervousness*] Why did you come here, Doctor? I told you not to come here.

DOCTOR. Let me in, Molly.

WOMAN. You must go away. Please go away, Doctor. . . .

DOCTOR. [*Interrupting. A quiet, commanding voice*] Open the door, Molly. . . . Quick, it's cold out here.

WOMAN. [*Opening the door*] I told you not to come here, Doctor.

DOCTOR. [*Entering. A man of thirty-five; heavily, but well clothed*] Don't talk about that. I'm half frozen.

WOMAN. [*Crossing to stove*] I'll stir up the fire a little.

DOCTOR. [*Following over; warming his hands*] Thanks.

WOMAN. I asked you not to come here, Doctor. You don't know what a risk you're running. If he saw you here now, he—he might kill you.

DOCTOR. That makes it interesting.

WOMAN. I'm serious, Doctor. He was talking about you only the other night; he hates you.

DOCTOR. Yes. It's a nice husband you've got.

WOMAN. You're in danger—in real danger.

DOCTOR. I've been in danger before.

WOMAN. [*Shaking her head, unable to continue. Puts her hands on his coat, weeping.*] Doctor! Doctor!

DOCTOR. It's all right, Molly. It's all right. I'm not going to let him hurt you.

WOMAN. I'm not thinking of myself.

DOCTOR. I know that. But *I* am. [*Noticing her arm*] What's this here?

WOMAN. [*Trying to pull her arm away*] Nothing. Nothing at all.

DOCTOR. Nothing? [*Pushing up the sleeve, looking at her. She drops her eyes.*] Nothing?

WOMAN. It's a burn.

DOCTOR. So I see. Dick has been up to his old tricks again.

WOMAN. He had a little too much to drink, Doctor.

DOCTOR. How did it happen?

WOMAN. He didn't know what he was doing.

DOCTOR. Let *me* judge, won't you? How did it happen?

WOMAN. Well, it was Tuesday night—

DOCTOR. After I had left?

WOMAN. Yes. He came in a little later. He had been drinking—and he was angry. You know, drink excites him terribly. And he told me to pull off his boots—and—and I suppose I was slow about it, so—so—

DOCTOR. So?

WOMAN. Oh, what's the use? It's over now.

DOCTOR. He took the poker, I should say, and he heated it—

WOMAN. Not very hot.

DOCTOR. As you say. He heated the poker, not *very* hot, and then he beat you with it, to make you a little quicker next time, eh?

WOMAN. He didn't hit me hard.

DOCTOR. No. I could see that. [*Crossing to her, and roughly passing his hand along her back*]

WOMAN. Oh! [*An involuntary cry of pain.*]

DOCTOR. Clever beast! Where it wouldn't show!

WOMAN. It's over now, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Yes. Then, when the poker was cold, I suppose he kicked you. Did he?

WOMAN. Yes.

DOCTOR. [*Nodding*] Nice, thoughtful fellow—your husband. [*A pause.*]

Is he home?

[*The* WOMAN *shakes her head.*]

When did he go?

WOMAN. Last night.

DOCTOR. With Conolly?

WOMAN. Yes.

DOCTOR. And Holzman?

WOMAN. Yes. He had something to attend to.

DOCTOR. Something to attend to?

WOMAN. Yes. The three of them went together.

DOCTOR. He didn't by any chance mention the Esmeralda?

WOMAN. The Esmeralda?

DOCTOR. The Esmeralda mine?

WOMAN. He said it needed fixing.

DOCTOR. I thought so.

WOMAN. Why, what do you mean, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Nothing.

WOMAN. [*Alarmed*] What do you mean?

DOCTOR. Would you be very much surprised if I told you that the Esmeralda was blown up at midnight?

WOMAN. Good God!

DOCTOR. There were four men killed.

WOMAN. And Dick!

DOCTOR. Oh, Dick wasn't touched! He took precious good care of his skin!

WOMAN. Dick escaped!

DOCTOR. *Escaped* nothing! He was the man who blew up the mine!

WOMAN. [*A long-drawn* Oh! *of horror.*]

DOCTOR. He ran no risk. There was clockwork, and he was a mile away when it blew up.

WOMAN. But Dick, that Dick should do such a thing! I don't believe he did it, Doctor! I don't believe it! You don't think so, do you?

[*The* DOCTOR *slowly pulls an object from his pocket.*]

What's that?

DOCTOR. That is part of a dry battery.

WOMAN. Well?

DOCTOR. The number is still on the bottom. Wainwright is pretty sure the manufacturers can identify it.

WOMAN. Wainwright?

DOCTOR. We roused him up. He thinks he sold it to Dick a week ago.

WOMAN. [*Breathlessly*] Well?

DOCTOR. It's funny that I found it at the Esmeralda!

WOMAN. At the Esmeralda?

DOCTOR. [*Nodding*] Just after the explosion.

WOMAN. [*Breaking into sobs, and burying her face on the* DOCTOR'S *lap*] Doctor, don't tell me any more! I don't want to know! I don't want to know!

DOCTOR. [*Stroking her head, and replacing battery in pocket*] It was bad enough without this, wasn't it? And you've stuck to him through it all! You women! [*He pauses.*] Even after he killed Maggie?

WOMAN. Don't say that, Doctor.

DOCTOR. It wasn't legal murder—he didn't do it all at once. It took him more than a year. A child can't stand what a grown woman can. [*He pauses.*] How old was she?

WOMAN. She would have been ten this month. . . .

[*The* DOCTOR *shakes his head in silent sympathy.*]

She was such a pretty child. See! [*She pulls a cheap locket from her bosom and opens it.*]

[*There is a pause.*]

DOCTOR. He beat her, too?

WOMAN. Yes.

DOCTOR. With the poker?

[*The* WOMAN *nods.*]

Heated—not *very* hot?

WOMAN. Oh, I tried to stop him, Doctor, but I couldn't do anything.

DOCTOR. I know that. [*He rises.*] And this brute, this devil, is the man you are living with!

WOMAN. Doctor!

DOCTOR. Yes, you're right. Words don't do any good.

WOMAN. He won't do it again. I'm sure.

DOCTOR. So am I!

WOMAN. What do you mean?

DOCTOR. [*Wheeling abruptly*] Get your things, Molly.

WOMAN. My things!

DOCTOR. Your wraps—plenty of them—it's cold outside.

WOMAN. But I'm not going out.

DOCTOR. You're coming with me.

WOMAN. [*Frightened*] Doctor!

DOCTOR. I couldn't stop him from killing Maggie, but he won't lay a hand on *you* again!

WOMAN. Doctor! I can't do it!

DOCTOR. You're not safe here.

WOMAN. Doctor! He's my husband!

DOCTOR. I don't care who he is! You're coming with me! [*Half leads, half pulls her toward the next room, talking.*]

[*The* WOMAN *resists feebly, exclaiming* No, Doctor! No!] I'm going to put you to bed for a week, and I'm going to make a well woman out of you. And then we'll find some work you can do—some light, easy work, and you won't know yourself—

[*A heavy thump at the door.*]

WOMAN. There's Dick! Doctor, if he finds you here . . .!

MAN. [*Outside*] Lemme in!

DOCTOR. Dick?

WOMAN. I expected him back before this.

MAN. Open up! Come on, open up!

WOMAN. For heaven's sake!

DOCTOR. [*Quietly drawing a revolver*] Open the door.

[*He goes to extreme left. The* WOMAN *opens the door. The* MAN *pushes in so suddenly that he almost upsets her.*]

MAN. [*Huge, uncouth, brutal*] Waitin' up fer me?

WOMAN. Yes, Dick.

MAN. Like a kin', d'voted wife, eh? [*Crossing to stove*] Glad ter see me, ain't ye?

WOMAN. Yes, Dick.

MAN. Ye better be. [*Flings off his coat. Sits. Sticks out his feet. She does not see.*] Well! Git a move on!

[*She runs over and tries to remove his boots.*]

Come on! Come on!

[*A pause.*]

God, you're clumsy! [*Pushing her away, trying to remove his boots himself*] I'll have ter learn ye—like last time. I'll learn ye, all right! I'll learn ye! [*He catches sight of the* DOCTOR. *Springs up furiously.*] You? What are *you* doin' here?

[*The* DOCTOR *does not answer.*]

Don't stand there gapin' like a damned fool! What are ye doin' here?

DOCTOR. Looking around.

MAN. Looking around?

DOCTOR. Yes.

MAN. Well, *see* anything ye like.

DOCTOR. Thanks.

MAN. An' get out.

DOCTOR. I'm going to.

MAN. [*Impatiently*] Well?

DOCTOR. I'm going to take Molly with me.

MAN. Yer goin' ter take Molly with ye? Oh, ho! That's rich! [*He pauses.*] In love with her?

DOCTOR. No.

MAN. Well?

DOCTOR. She doesn't belong here.

MAN. Don't belong here? Goin' ter take her with ye? Goin' ter come between man an' wife, till death do us part? An' what'll *I* be doin'?

DOCTOR. I don't care.

MAN. But *I* do. [*Throwing an arm roughly around the* WOMAN'S *waist.*] She stays here! See?

DOCTOR. You needn't argue.

MAN. I ain't goin' ter. [*Approaching the* DOCTOR] But I'm goin' ter give ye the damndest lickin' ye ever had before ye get out o' here! [*Seizing poker*] I'm goin' ter mess up that pretty face o' yer fer ye!

DOCTOR. [*Leveling revolver*] Stop!

MAN. Eh? He's got his artillery with him!

DOCTOR. Yes. I knew where I was going.

MAN. Well, shoot an' be damned ter ye! Garn! Shoot! Shoot an unarmed man!

DOCTOR. Sit down.

MAN. Eh?

DOCTOR. Sit down.

MAN. Oh, ho! Orderin' me around in my own—

DOCTOR. [*Interrupting furiously*] I've heard just about enough from you. Now sit down!

[DICK *slouches to a chair; sits. During the following dialogue he slowly rocks the chair back and forth, gradually, and almost imperceptibly moving it to the extreme right, next to the cupboard.*]

I'm not going to call you names. There's nothing in the English language bad enough for you, and you wouldn't care what I called you. But I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do to you.

MAN. [*Leaning back; drawling*] Yes?

DOCTOR. You killed your daughter.

WOMAN. [*Interrupting*] Doctor!

DOCTOR. [*Silencing her with a gesture*] If I'd a had my way, they'd a hung you for it! But I got here too late: I couldn't prove that she died as a result of what—of what you did to her. And we've got to give even such curs as you the benefit of the doubt.

MAN. She was always sickly.

DOCTOR. So you helped her by beating her with a poker—red hot.

MAN. Well, Maggie was *my* daughter.

DOCTOR. God rest her soul!

WOMAN. Amen!

DOCTOR. Your wife is sickly, too, I suppose?

MAN. Runs in the family.

DOCTOR. So you are treating her in the same way you treated Maggie?

MAN. Is it any of *your* business how I treat her?

DOCTOR. Yes, it is.

MAN. Well, I say it isn't.

DOCTOR. [*Leveling the revolver again*] And I say it is!

MAN. Oh!

DOCTOR. That is why I'm going to take Molly away with me.

MAN. [*After a pause*] That all ye got to say?

DOCTOR. No, it isn't.

MAN. Well, go on. I'm listenin'.

DOCTOR. There was an explosion in the King Edward mine three months ago.

MAN. Yes.

DOCTOR. Nobody was hurt.

MAN. Lord be praised!

DOCTOR. There was another explosion in the same mine a few weeks later. That time a dozen men were blown to pieces.

MAN. What's this? A sermon? [*By this time he has reached the cupboard; he bends slowly and, unobserved, takes from it a milk bottle half full of liquid.*]

DOCTOR. There were a good many more explosions after that. Then, last night—

MAN. [*Watching him from the corner of his eye and speaking casually*] Last night?

DOCTOR. The Esmeralda was blown up.

MAN. [*Balancing the bottle on his knees*] Ye don't mean it!

WOMAN. You didn't have anything to do with it, Dick, did you?

[*The* MAN *pushes her away.*]

DOCTOR. Conolly has been arrested already.

MAN. Yes?

DOCTOR. His body is hanging from a tree down the road.

MAN. Without a trial?

DOCTOR. There was no time for any. Now they're after Holzman. He left town early, but they'll get him. They've telegraphed ahead.

[*A pause.*]

And I've got *you!*

WOMAN. Dick, Dick, say you didn't do it!

MAN. Ah, go way. What's the evidence, Doc?

DOCTOR. [*Showing fragment of battery*] This.

MAN. What is it?

DOCTOR. Part of the battery you bought at Wainwright's.

MAN. Did he identify it?

DOCTOR. Not positively. He doesn't keep a record of the numbers. He's writing to the factory.

MAN. That all the evidence against me?

DOCTOR. Yes. It's a little thing, Dick, but it's enough to hang you.

MAN. The number on the bottom of the battery?

DOCTOR. Yes.

MAN. [*Rising lazily*] Well, scratch it off.

DOCTOR. Eh?

MAN. Scratch it off, I said.

DOCTOR. Do you think I'm crazy?

MAN. Do you think *I'm* crazy? [*Toward center.*]

DOCTOR. [*With revolver*] Stay where you are!

MAN. [*Raising milk bottle*] Don't make me laugh! [*He pauses.*] D'ye see this? [*Waving the bottle*] Half a quart o' nitroglycerine! Half a quart!

DOCTOR. What?

WOMAN. [*Going toward him*] Dick!

MAN. [*Turning on her brutally*] Keep away from me! [*Turns to* DOCTOR.] If ye shoot, I'll drop this—an' it's mighty pertikler where it lands. Or if ye don't shoot, mebbe I'll drop it anyhow. It took only this much to fix the Esmeralda.

DOCTOR. So you *did* it!

WOMAN. Dick, you!

MAN. Of course. . . .

[*As* DOCTOR *approaches.*]

Go easy. I'm not lookin' fer company!

DOCTOR. Ah, you're bluffing!

MAN. Bluffin', eh?

DOCTOR. I've heard of that trick before! You've got water in there!

MAN. Water, eh? Well, you're a doctor—[*Taking a knife from table; dipping it into bottle*]—taste it! [*He hands the knife to the* DOCTOR.] Well?

[*The* DOCTOR *tastes; then silently puts away his revolver.*]

Ah!

DOCTOR. Think of your wife, man!

MAN. Cut it! Cut it! Now, let's talk. [*Sits.*] You're a religious man, ain't ye, Doc.

DOCTOR. Yes, I am.

MAN. Go to church on Sunday?

DOCTOR. Yes.

MAN. You'd keep an oath?

DOCTOR. What do you mean?

MAN. You're going to swear to do what I want before ye get out o' here—alive.

DOCTOR. I'll do nothing of the kind.

MAN. Then ye won't get out—alive.

[*Pause.*]

The number on that battery is all the evidence they've got against me. You're going to scrape that off. You're going to tell them I'm innocent—you've talked to me, an' you're sure of it. They'll believe *you*.

DOCTOR. [*Quietly*] I won't do it.

MAN. Oh, there's no hurry! Think it over.

[*Pause.*]

If ye do, I won't touch ye—an' if ye don't ye'll be sprinkled all over the county in a minute.

WOMAN. Doctor, he means what he says. I know him. For God's sake—

DOCTOR. [*Interrupting*] Do you think I'm afraid of death? If I were I wouldn't be a doctor! I ran more risk when the yellow fever broke out in Havana than I do now!

WOMAN. But, Doctor, you are young! Your life is valuable! You don't care about him. Do what he asks!

DOCTOR. [*Pushing her away*] I am not a coward.

MAN. Well, Doc, I ain't a coward any more than you. What have ye got to say? Quick!

DOCTOR. [*Rapidly*] Molly, if—if anything happens to me, you will find that I have left you some money—enough to take you East—to my sister. She knows about you. She'll take care of you.

MAN. [*Interrupting*] Come on! Come on!

DOCTOR. [*Disregarding him*] You understand, Molly?

WOMAN. But, Doctor—

DOCTOR. You understand?

WOMAN. Yes.

DOCTOR. [*Turning to the* MAN] As for you, you think you're going to get away?

MAN. Mebbe.

DOCTOR. You won't. [*Drawing revolver*] If it's the last thing I do, I'll shoot you. And if *I* don't get you, they'll get you outside.

MAN. [*Excitedly*] What do ye mean?

DOCTOR. [*Lying desperately*] I didn't come alone. I brought a dozen men with me. Look for yourself.

MAN. Where?

DOCTOR. Anywheres. Outside.

[*The* MAN *goes toward the door, begins to open it. The* DOCTOR *rushes at him. The* MAN, *who half expects it, dodges, jumps back, raises the bottle with a snarl, and throws it as the* DOCTOR *fires. There is a terrific explosion. The lights go out, and dawn, an instant later, begins to break through a thin, pungent smoke which is rapidly drifting away on the fresh morning breeze. The rear and left walls of the shack are blown out, and the snow-clad hillside is dimly visible. The left of the stage is encumbered with débris, and a body appears to be beneath it. The right is practically untouched, and the* MAN, *standing there, with his hands over his eyes, is moaning in agony. The* WOMAN, *uninjured, but screaming hysterically, is feverishly searching the ruins. The* DOCTOR, *apparently unhurt, stands at the left with a child, a child in the garments of the working class, at his side.*]

DOCTOR. What a smash! What a terrific smash!

WOMAN. [*Searching*] Doctor! Doctor! Where are you?

DOCTOR. Here I am!

[*The* WOMAN *does not appear to hear him.*]

WOMAN. Where are you, Doctor? Are you hurt?

DOCTOR. No, I'm not hurt.

WOMAN. [*Falling to her knees at the side of a body, with a torrent of sobs*] Doctor! Oh, Doctor!

THE CHILD. [*Touching his sleeve*] Doctor!

DOCTOR. Eh? How do you come here? [*Thunderstruck, staggering back, almost fainting*] You—who are you?

THE CHILD. [*With a winsome smile*] Why, I'm Maggie.

DOCTOR. M-Maggie? But you—you are *dead*!

THE CHILD. [*Smiling gently*] So are you.

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY

BETHLEHEM[1]

A Nativity Play

BY

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

Laurence Housman is an Englishman. He is a man of marked and varied talent. He is a poet and artist of distinction, a writer of fiction; he is a translator; audiences welcome his lectures, and he is a dramatist of considerable reputation. With such significant genius, his plays are naturally good literature. His best-known dramatic works are *Prunella, or Love in a Dutch Garden*, written in collaboration with Mr. H. Granville-Barker; *The Chinese Lantern*; and *Little Plays of St. Francis.*

Bethlehem is a very tender play on the Christmas story. The lines depart from the traditional Christmas tale only for the sake of illustrative action. When read or acted with reverence and conviction, this play of the Nativity will not fail in its effect. A distinct quality is, that should it seem inexpedient to use *Bethlehem* as a whole, there are scenes that are excellently adapted for isolated representation. Music, as an accompaniment to the songs, will enhance their appeal.

[1] Copyright, 1902, by The Macmillan Company; 1926, by Laurence Housman. All rights reserved. Applications for the right of performing *Bethlehem* must be made to LeRoy Phillips, 41 Winter Street, Boston, Mass.

CHARACTERS

The principal characters who have speaking parts are MARY, JOSEPH, GABRIEL, Seven Shepherds, *one* ABEL *by name,* Three Kings, and Chorus. *There is a chorus of* Angels, *and there are* Voices of Singers *without. Other characters appear who have no lines to speak. Some parts can be doubled.*

BETHLEHEM

Scene I

[Chorus *enters and speaks before the curtain.*]

Ye Gentles, that come here to watch our play,
Put, we beseech you, thought of us away!
No standing here have we: in heart we kneel,
With, at our hearts, this prayer,—that ye may feel
How in Love's hands time is a little thing!
And so shall Love tonight your senses bring
Back to the hills of Bethlehem, the fold
Where shepherds watched their sheep, where angels told
Of peace, goodwill to men, in Christ new-born,
By Whom, from Virgin Birth, our flesh goes worn.
Also, if we may guide you, ye shall see
The manger where in great humility
Lieth that Babe, the Maker of us all,
By Mary's side, amid the beasts in stall.
And ye shall see the coming of the Kings,
Led by a star; and Gabriel that brings
Unto Saint Joseph, in a dream by night,
Word of King Herod's fear, and counsels flight.
So, lastly, ye shall see them rise and go,
And the place vacant left. Yet ye shall know
That Love remains, and that Faith sees it so.
So, have ye hope! let Time your trust increase!
Hark, I hear music! Christmas comes; 'tis peace.

[*Pastoral music: a* Shepherd's *voice is heard.*]

The world is old tonight,
The world is old;

The stars around the fold
Do show their light, do show their light.
And so they did, and so,
A thousand years ago,
And so will do, dear Love, when you lie cold.

[*The curtain opens and discloses a bare field with a scarp of rock to the right; in the background are low hills covered with snow. To the left lies a fold surrounded with high wattles. Under shelter of the rock* Shepherds *are gathered; overhead, with his feet hanging over the ledge, a* Shepherd-Boy *sits to keep watch, and at intervals gives the watcher's cry.*]

YOUNG SHEPHERD [*Sings*]

The world is still tonight,
The world is still;
The snow on vale and hill
Like wool lies white, like wool lies white.
And so it was, and so,
A thousand years ago,
And so will be, good lads, when we lack will.

WATCHER

Ay-oh, ay-oh, ay-oh!

1ST SHEPHERD

There be good fairies up in air tonight:
Come ere a frost so mild with stars so bright?
The wind has shut itself in-door again,
And all the air be saft like a'ter rain.

WATCHER

Ay-oh, ay-oh, ay-oh!

2D SHEPHERD [*Rising*]

The sheep be quiet; the dogs have naught to do;
The lambs come kind; there haven't been a ewe
Lost, nor a still one born, this moon, there an't:
A thing I can't remember, nor I can't,
Since I've been shepherd:—that's nigh forty year.

3D SHEPHERD

Well, well!

4TH SHEPHERD

What star be that'n out yonder there?
It's been a-coming on, night a'ter night,
This long time back, but never looked so bright
As 'a do now.

WATCHER

Ay-oh, ay-oh, ay-oh!

4TH SHEPHERD

D'you think stars have a way
Of coming out like, special, when they got summut to say?
I've often wondered how it is they are:
You never seem to get no nearer to a star,—
Walk a'ter 'em a mile they still seem just as far.

3D SHEPHERD

'Tis as God made 'em. Like as they were geese,
Go a'ter 'em, and they turns tail and flees;
Then you go back, and back they come at you!
So as God made 'em's what they got to do.

1ST SHEPHERD

Aye, I don't doubt the stars lays facts to mind:
There's them as say men's names be marked and signed,—
Writ in the roof up there, for proof that God's behind.

WATCHER

Ay-oh, ay-oh, ay-oh!

5TH SHEPHERD

You think a star knows what it's all about,
A-blazing for?

1ST SHEPHERD

I haven't got a doubt
He does! That star—now, don't tell me no more
You think he don't know what he's shining for!
Look at him jerking and working, and a-winking and a-blinking;—
Well,—that's him thinking.

3D SHEPHERD

Well, if he thinks the things God sets him to,
Like we poor men, he got enough to do!

WATCHER

Ay-oh, ay-oh, ay-oh!

4TH SHEPHERD

There's old blind Abe a-looking! Don't he seem
As if he saw it?

2D SHEPHERD

Aye! he likes to dream
He's won his sight back, tho' it's been twelve year gone.
Abe, what d'you think you've got your eye upon?

ABEL

A good sight! aye, and a sight as you can't see
So well as I. The thought just come to me,
While all of you sat talking by my side,

Like to the word the prophet prophesied;—
And while you talked, the thought o' it kep' me dumb:—
Shiloh, thinks I,—will I see Shiloh come?
And all at once these words were in my head,—
What he,—the man whose eyes were open—said
Aforetime, "I shall see him;—but not now!"
Says he, "I shall behold him;—but not nigh:
"Out of Jacob there shall come forth a Star,
"And a Scepter in Israel shall be raised high."—
So he bare witness of things seen afar.
And that being told so many years ago,
Yet still to come, do surely seem to show
How we be likelier to behold that Star
Than he who only spoke o' it from afar.
And in that day, 'tis told, the dumb shall talk,
The old shall leap, and the lame man shall walk,
And the blind man recover back his sight!

3D SHEPHERD

Well, well, it may be so! God will do right.

1ST SHEPHERD

May we be there to see when that day shows:
What it can do for such as we—God knows!

WATCHER

Ay-oh! . . .

[*He breaks off suddenly, leaps down from the rock, and, seizing* 1ST SHEPHERD, *points terror-stricken. A sound of wind is heard.*]

1ST SHEPHERD

Why! who be yon fine gentleman in white
Stepping across the sheepfolds to the right?

4TH SHEPHERD

How comes it that his face be lit so bright?

3D SHEPHERD

The blood pricks in my thumbs;
'Tis like a ghost he comes!
[*They huddle fearfully under the rock, crossing themselves.*]

[*Enter* GABRIEL. *He makes the sign of the cross toward them.*]

GABRIEL

Let nothing you annoy!
Behold, I bring
Good tidings of great joy:
To you a King
This day is born, to you and all mankind;
Even Christ the Lord, to man's estate resigned.

3D SHEPHERD

O Lord, O Lord! was ever the like heard tell!

ABEL

Hold ye your peace, neighbors! he speaks us well.

GABRIEL

And of that same
Let this be for a sign:
In Bethlehem,
Cradled amid the kine,
A Babe in swaddling-bands ye there shall find.

4TH SHEPHERD

Have you no fear? Oh, Abel, but you're blind!

ABEL [*Advancing*]

Peace, and give ear! New light shines in my mind.

GABRIEL

And as a shepherd he shall feed
  His flocks, and in his arms shall bear
  The lambs, and like a father fair
The ewes with young shall lead.

[Angels *appear.*]

ANGELS

Semi-Chorus	*Semi-Chorus*
Glory to God	In the Highest!
Who unto man	Now comes nighest.
Peace be to earth!	Goodwill to all!
Christ the new Birth	Redeems man's fall.

GABRIEL

Ye holy and humble men of fearful heart,
Be not afraid with these to take your part!
Tonight God gives you sight; then be not blind;
Behold with us the high celestial mind!
Ye also with one voice must here rejoice.

1ST SHEPHERD

We be poor mortals! Here's all Heaven in sight!

GABRIEL

The Heavens themselves are joined with earth tonight.
Fear not, but rise; Mercy and Truth are met;
And Righteousness on Peace her seal hath set.
  Stand and be strong,
  Ye, too, shall share our song!
[*The* Angels *embrace the* Shepherds.]

SEMI-CHORUS

Glory to God; on earth, peace, goodwill!
He smites with His rod, and the waters are still;
He maketh it bud for the evil and good,
He lifts the low valley and bends the high hill.

SEMI-CHORUS

Thou Christ art the Rod, and Thy reign shall be peace!
At the power of Thy nod all warfare shall cease.
The desert shall blossom and be as the rose,
When the Healing of nations from Bethlehem flows.

CHORUS

Glory to God In the Highest!
Who unto man Now comes nighest.
Peace be to earth! Goodwill to all!
Christ the new Birth Redeems man's fall.

[*The* Angels *disappear.*]

4TH SHEPHERD

Sir, have we dreamed this?

GABRIEL

Let your own hearts tell!
Do dreams bequeath such joy! Your bosoms swell,
Your faces glow, your eyes are full of cheer.
Why are they so? Lately you had great fear,
And stood as huddled flocks before a storm;
Have dreams, then, made you warm?

4TH SHEPHERD

Oh, Sir, 'tis true!
Yet scarcely do I know what next to do.

2D SHEPHERD

You come wi' me, lad! come along o' me,
We'll all be off to Bethlehem, and see
What they be doing there! Lord, Lord, I doubt
Whether I'll know to find me way about
With such high things a-happening!
Sir, you see
There ain't much show about the likes o' we,
But what I say's—if this be true— well, well,
'Tis the best news that ever I heard tell!

1ST SHEPHERD

And the best fortune any on us has had!
Lord, though, but don't it make an old heart glad!
Christ born? You say it is so, Sir? So be it!
Thank God as we should be alive to see it!

ABEL

Be He at Bethlehem?

GABRIEL

Aye, there go ye!
While ye so fare, your folds shall guarded be;
Round them even now stand those ye do not see.
Go ye in peace!

SHEPHERDS

We thank you kindly, Sir.

SHEPHERDS [*Sing*]

Now we will go, now we will go,
The way we know to Bethlehem;
That they may show, and we may know,
'Tis even so as you proclaim.

And we will take the bread we bake,
The wine we make, as gifts to them;
And milk and cheese; and on our knees
Will offer these at Bethlehem.

And He shall know we love Him so,
But cannot show a better way
Of service dear, and loving cheer,
Than we do here on Christmas Day.
[*Exeunt several of the* Shepherds.]

6TH SHEPHERD

Sir, do you think that I might make so bold
As offer Him a young lamb from the fold?
'Twas the first dropped this lambing time; maybe
He'll take it kindly from the likes o' we,
We being simple shepherds.

GABRIEL

Simple? Yes!
Would God, all minds had this same simpleness!
Take Him what gifts ye will! Tonight on earth
All's peace to greet Christ's birth.
[*He makes the sign of the cross on them, and turns away.*]

5TH SHEPHERD

Noticed you that?
He made the shepherd's sign: 'a did it pat!

SHEPHERDS [*Without*]

Come on, lads, come!

6TH SHEPHERD

Good-night, Sir.

GABRIEL

Peace befall
You and your ways! Good-night, friend; good-night, all.
[*Exeunt* Shepherds.]

SHEPHERDS [*In the distance singing*]

And we will go, and we will go,
The way we know to Bethlehem;
That Love may show, and we may know,
'Tis even so as you proclaim.

[*As the song of the* Shepherds *dies away, angelic music is again heard softly filling the air.* GABRIEL *covers himself with a shepherd's cloak and stands leaning on a shepherd's crook by the rock that overlooks the fold. A light begins steadily to increase and flood the stage, coming from the left. Enter presently the* Angel of the Star. *As he crosses the stage, bearing the Star in his hands,* GABRIEL *kneels down in reverence. The* Angel *departs upon the road to Bethlehem. Enter the* Kings. *They advance, singing, along the higher ground at the back of the stage, and descend by a winding path toward the front. During what follows, their processions pass silently along the road to Bethlehem, following the light of the Star. Only the* Kings' banner-bearers *remain, standing motionless to the end.*]

1ST KING

Hear me, O King of Kings,
And give me my desire!

2D KING

Hive me beneath Thy wings,
And guide my feet with fire!

3D KING

Unto that Holy Mount,
  Where forth from Thee goes Light.

ALL

Whence springs a Living Fount
  To wash the whole world white.

GABRIEL

Peace be with you, and hail!
Where go ye this fair night,
Travelers, and what seek ye?

1ST KING

We seek from the hill the vale,
And from the vale the hill.

2D KING

From the ends of the morning, rest;
And from the East the West.

3D KING

In the darkness we seek fire,
And out of dreams the heart's desire!
And, if today we fail,
Tomorrow we seek it still.

GABRIEL

Are ye not weary, seeking so?
Are ye not laden with care?

1ST KING

We are not weary. If our feet be slow,
'Tis with the burden of the Love we bear.

It is our longing for the Light we seek
Which makes us weak.

GABRIEL

What is the longing of each one?

3D KING

Melchior, wilt thou first speak?

2D KING

Too slow my footsteps move
For the goal I seek to prove.
My body is a waste,
Through which my soul doth haste,
Famished until it taste
Its nameless new desire!
A flame my spirit owns,
Ashes are all my bones,
Love lights in me such fire!
I thirst! my throat is dried!
I ask;—am still denied!
Cry to be satisfied:
Yet only as love will.
Now, if He come not first,
Not death, but ease were worst;—
Let me die, thirsting still!

GABRIEL

And you?

3D KING

I have such Love!
Beauty, I know not of,
Hath laid on me the vision of its Light.

When that Light shines, earth's ends
Therein shall all be friends:
They shall not hurt nor kill, but on the height
Named Holy shall be peace.
Then shall all warfare cease
And every king his crown
Shall at the cradle of a new-born Babe lay down.

GABRIEL

And thou, that standest last,
Say what desire thou hast?

1ST KING

For Earth's waiting to be done;
For God to send forth His Son,
Godhead and man made one!
That creation, wrought afresh,
May be finished and made whole;
That the Word may become Flesh,
And Earth receive her soul!
Pray we for this,
Seeing well how good it is.

GABRIEL

Behold, this night shall bring you to your bliss.

3D KING

Whence comes thy knowledge to make hope so near?

GABRIEL

Oh, let your ears be opened till they hear!
Open your eyes, and mark with fearless sight
The throng of thanksgiving which fills this night:
Nor walks on heaven alone, but earth as well!
Sound in sweet tone, celestial Choirs, and tell!

ANGELS [*Appearing*]

Glory to God In the Highest!
Who unto Man Now comes nighest.
Peace be to earth! Goodwill to all!
Christ the new Birth Redeems man's fall.

[*They disappear.*]

1ST KING

Oh, ye blest sounds, be as the air we breathe!

2D KING

Oh, fair things seen, your light to us bequeath!

3D KING

And if there be an ending to our quest,
Show, now, where lies our rest!

GABRIEL

O Kings, your quest is ended now, earth joins
To greet her Lord, in Heaven's exultant strains.
Righteousness is the girdle of His loins,
And faithfulness the girdle of His reins.
The Spirit of God shall rest on Him, of might,
Of wisdom, and of counsel, and of fear:
He shall not judge according unto sight,
Neither reprove by the hearing of His ear:
But by His righteousness shall He do right,
And with His equity the meek repay;
Out of His mouth a rod the earth shall smite,
And by His breath the wicked He shall slay.
The wolf shall make his dwelling in the fold,
The leopard and the kid together play,
The young lion with the fatling: and behold
A Little Child shall lead them in the way!
Then like the ox the lion shall eat straw,

The calf and the young bear be in one pen;
The suckling from his hole the asp shall draw,
And the weaned child play by the adder's den.
They shall not hurt in all my Holy Hill,
Nor shall there any more destruction be:
The knowledge of the Lord the earth shall fill,
Even as the water covereth the sea.
And He shall raise His people from their sin.
This is the way of Life: walk ye therein!

[*A vision of a* Young Child *appears before them in the way leading to Bethlehem. All kneel.*]

1st King

Where shall we find Him? where throw off our load?

Gabriel

In Bethlehem Peace makes His fair abode
Yonder His star still lights you to your road.

[*The* Kings *depart.* Gabriel *makes the sign of blessing and is taken up into heaven.*]

Scene II

[Chorus *enters and speaks before the curtain.*]

O ye, that would go in to Bethlehem town,
Now let your hearts for very love bend down!
So, in one fellowship with herds and kings,
Will we too see Peace close her mothering wings
Round all the world, and reap into her breast
The million ills which here come seeking rest.
At these dear doors all may afford to wait
Where Love in pure humility keeps state.
Draw near in faith! Then, by these figures dim,
Through us presented, may ye look on Him
Whose Light till now outshone the Seraphim.

Come, little Town, your narrow doors undo,
To show how our dear Love is born in you!

[*The curtain opens and shows the inn-stable at Bethlehem. An open court, surrounded on three sides by a cattle-shed with thatched roofs. In the center stands a large "cradle" for fodder, above which hangs a canopy, rudely constructed of a cloak thrown over a traveler's staff thrust into the eaves of thatch, from which also a small lantern hangs. Above the roof shows a clear starlit sky. At the back of the stable to the right is a door opening to the street; at the left, a cave in a wall of rock shut off from the rest of the stable by a large grille, behind which the beasts are stalled.* MARY *reclines in the cradle, with the* Holy Child *concealed beneath her robe.* JOSEPH *is seated close by on a low stool. His shoes lie near him, together with staff, lantern, and saddlebags. He bends over a scroll of parchment, reading. Without, voices are heard singing.*]

"Noel, Noel, Noel,"
Sang the church bell;
"God's in His Heaven,
This know well!"

Noel, Noel, Noel,
Ding-dong-bell,
God from High Heaven
Comes on earth to dwell.

"Noel, Noel, Noel,"
Bells ring on earth,
"Come and know well
This bright Birth!"

JOSEPH [*Rising and advancing to the cradle*]

Sleepest thou, Mary?

MARY

I sleep not; I pray.
Behold, on me my Lord His Head doth lay.
Look how in sleep He takes a mortal's rest:
See where His Hand is laid upon my breast!

JOSEPH

Mary, I dread to see!

MARY

Nay, come more near;
But wake Him not!

JOSEPH

Alas! I have such fear.

MARY

I too: my soul is glad through very dread
While in this chamber God doth make His Bed:
For now our eyes behold the glorious Birth
Which shall uplift again low-fallen earth.
Here, where He rests, amid these hollowed rocks,
I hear the world's heart move in joyful shocks,—
The pulsing of her rivers and her springs:
I feel the air beat with the throb of wings:
And farther up, amid the heavenly maze,
The stars and planets with adoring gaze
Look down and say, "O maid with favor stored,
How com'st thou to be Mother of our Lord?"
What can I answer, I? Let Gabriel
Speak to those heavenly questioners, and tell
How by the Holy Ghost this came to be;
How power from the Highest o'ershadowed me,

Till in my heart God came Himself to lie,
Perfect fulfillment of all prophecy.
Naught may I know save this: His handmaid I.

VOICES

"Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum! Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et Benedictus Fructus ventris tui, Jesus."

[*A knocking is heard, and a sound of pastoral music without.* JOSEPH, *passing before the crib, bows down in reverence. He goes to the door.*]

JOSEPH

Who knocks?

SHEPHERD [*Without*]

A friend: we be all friendly men:
We be the shepherds.

JOSEPH

Come in, shepherds, then:
Here's welcome waiting you! Behold and bless
The Peace within your gates, the Plenteousness!

[*The* Shepherds *enter. As they come within sight of the crib they pull off their hats, cross themselves, and kneel.* MARY *makes the sign of the cross toward them in greeting.*]

1ST SHEPHERD

Mother of God, welcome to Bethlehem!

MARY

Shepherds of Israel, welcome to Christ's Birth!

OMNES

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee! Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and in the hour of our death. Amen.

MARY

Behold the handmaid of the Lord!
So as His Word hath His Way been;
Now Earth to Heaven doth room afford;
The Godhead veiled in Flesh is seen.
Come and adore, in form of man,
The Word that was ere worlds began!

[*She raises herself and sits with her mantle still covering the* Holy Child.]

OMNES

Mother Mary, hail!
And of thy Grace,
Lift away the veil
That hides God's face!

Here God lies
For a short space.
Mary, Mother wise,
Show us God's face!

Mary, all the lands,
Mary, all the seas,
Gather in thy hands
To thy dear knees!

Mary, maiden white,
Mother, pure within,
Show to mortal sight
Love that cures sin!

1st Shepherd

Mother Mary, may we see God?

Mary

Stand near in faith, behold,
  Be comforted by Him!
Here, shepherds, is your fold.

Abel

Lady, I cannot see: mine eyes are dim.

Mary

Come near, in faith: come near!
  Thou shalt win sight.
Doubt not: have thou no fear!

Abel

Lady, mine eyes be healed and full of light!

Mary

  Even so, even so,
  Let Earth perceive and know!

[Joseph *aiding,* Mary *lifts her mantle and reveals* Christ *to them. All bow forward in adoration and are silent for a time.*]

1st Shepherd

Son of God, shine on us!

2d Shepherd

Lamb of God, look on us!

3d Shepherd

Shepherd of men, set Thy sign on us!

4TH SHEPHERD

And lay Thy yoke on us!

5TH SHEPHERD

And we will be thankful.

[MARY *again covers the* Child.]

1ST SHEPHERD [*Kneeling*]

Queen, Mother, pardon me who make so bold
To speak! but hearts grown full be hard to hold.
Tonight, as Heaven hath willed, have come thy way
Poor folk with meager speech yet much to say.
So, if word lack, let thine own wisdom fill:
And—give me countenance!—I'll not speak ill.
Dear Mother, pray for us! Foolish we be,
Untaught and rude: but what we see we see,
And what we hear we hear; to what's above
Our heads we bow: and what we love we love!
And, loving thee since our first entrance in,
Do thereby more love God, and more hate sin;
And of all lips would have thy lips to pray
Pardon for us and peace to seek His way.
  Fair Mother, we have old men here among,
As thou may'st see; and thou, we see, art young:
Yet the name "Mother" runneth to the tongue
That seeks a name for thee. May we not all
Thee as our Lady and our Mother call,
For thy Son's sake?

MARY

Amen. So, shepherds, do!
Call as Love bids you, and I'll answer you.
  [*The* Shepherds *come forward and present their gifts.*]

1st Shepherd

Mother, I have laid bread here at thy feet.
For thy Son's sake, I pray thee take and eat!

2d Shepherd

Mother, I bring thee milk.

3d Shepherd

I bring thee cheese.

4th Shepherd

I have brought nuts. Strengthen His teeth on these,
When they begin to pair.

5th Shepherd

Also here's wine,
Good for a festal, or when frost bites fine.
Also my cloak is thine.

6th Shepherd

Dear Mother, for God's sake,
Wilt thou, I prithee, take
This firstling from the fold?
It is so beautiful,
And thereto hath warm wool
To ward one from the cold.
Take it, then, to thy lap
Beside thy Son:
It may keep warm, mayhap,
The Blessed One.

Mary

It shall keep warm my heart, shepherd, to thee.

7TH SHEPHERD

Mother, my empty hands do me a wrong:
No gift have I, but in my lips a song
Such as we shepherds sing.

MARY

Such songs are best.
Tonight your lips shall lull the Shepherd's King
To rest.

7TH SHEPHERD [*Sings*]

The world is old tonight,
The world is old;
The stars around the fold
Do show their light.
And so they did, and so,
A thousand years ago,
And so will do, dear Love, when you lie cold.
[*Speaks.*] Nay, nay, but I can sing no more thereof;
I had forgot the sadness of the end!

MARY

Thou hast but prophesied how men shall scoff
Even at Love, my friend.
[*Knocking is heard.*]

JOSEPH

Ho, there without! Who knocks? Come ye in peace?

KINGS [*Without*]

Kings, seeking it, we come!

JOSEPH

Here enter, and find ease!

[*The* Kings *enter and advance, kneeling three times.*]

1st King

Blessed be God!

Omnes

Blessed be God!

2d King

Blessed be His Holy Name!

Omnes

Blessed be His Holy Name!

3d King

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man!

Omnes

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man!

1st King

Oh, finished quest!
    Oh, rest!

2d King

Oh, Fount, that first
Of all hath satisfied my thirst!

3d King

Oh, Light,
That brings me sight!

1st King [*Approaching, kneels before the cradle.*]

Thou Birth Divine,
    Behold
The earthly sign

Of power and kingship, gold,
Here in my hands I hold,
And offer, to be Thine.

2D KING [*Approaching and kneeling*]

This frankincense
Let be
A symbol, whence
All men may learn to see
How veiled a mystery
Defeats man's sense, where Godhead deigns to be!

3D KING [*Approaching and kneeling*]

Oh, Comforter of souls,
I bring Thee myrrh.
When grief my heart controls
And darkness round me rolls,
Sweet Saviour, be Thou near!

THE THREE KINGS

Thanksgiving, Praise, and Prayer,
Three offerings meet,
We lay in equal share
Before Christ's feet.

MARY

Your welcome gifts,
Proffered in love, from Earth to Heaven He lifts.

THE KINGS

Now see we Love on Earth His throne!
All we have known,
Or hoped to gain,
Was this alone—
That He might reign!

OMNES

That He might reign!
Oh, welcome Birth! let all adore
The Christ made Man forevermore.

THE SHEPHERDS

'Tis Christmas morn:
Come ye, and bow the knee!
Lo, here we see
The perfect Man is born.

CHORUS [*In alternate parts*, Kings *and* Shepherds]

For this fair Birth
(Which now we see!)
Shows forth God's worth,
(Then sing we merrily!)
And makes glad earth,
And brings man mirth.
(So sing we merrily this fair Birth!)

THE KINGS

'Tis Christmas Day:
Oh pray,—put off your sins!
This day begins
For man the perfect way.

CHORUS [*As before*]

For this fair Birth
(Which now we see!)
Shows forth God's worth,
(Then sing we merrily!)
And makes glad earth,
And brings man mirth.
(So sing we merrily this fair Birth!)

[*During this song the* Attendants *of the* Kings *have entered secretly, and they kneel in an outer ring about the walls of the stable.*]

OMNES

Mother Mary, give us thy Son's Blessing!
[*All kneel. They sing.*]

Mary, Gate of Day,
Lend thine intercession!
Holy Mother May,
Pray for my transgression!

Ere He yet touched Earth,
He did first touch thee;
Through thy perfect worth
God reached down for me.

[MARY, *rising, stands in the cradle under shadow of the canopy, displaying the* Child *in her breast, still partly covered by her veil.* JOSEPH *and one of the* Shepherds *lift and draw back the ends of her long robe.*]

MARY

The word expressed
In Flesh hath come;
Against my breast
The Voice lies dumb,
That shall be of all prophecies the sum.

Oh, Thou dread Voice
Of Heaven's decree,
Who madest choice
To dwell with me,
Now through my lips, this once, let utterance be!

My Peace I leave,
My Peace I give:

All that receive
The same shall live;
And tribute hearts win joy retributive.

The Cup I bless,
The Bread I break,
Is Righteousness!
Draw near and take!
Eat, drink, and hold remembrance for Love's sake!

The peace of Peace,
Outpassing sense,
Give your mind's ease
When ye go hence.
Love, peace, and pardon be your recompense!

[*She seats herself in the cradle as one enthroned, laying the* Child *upon her knee under shadow of her robe.*]

OMNES

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee! Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and in the hour of our death. Amen.

MARY

Kings from far countries have ye come to see
A King Whose reign shall make all kingdoms free.
Low at His feet your crowns ye cast to ground;
From this day forward ye shall go more crowned;
For, named hereafter, ye shall be named wise,
Seeing that in Heaven ye watched Christ's star arise.
Great kings ye came, but much more great ye go,
Who to His state have bowed yourselves so low.
And you, dear Shepherds, to your settled folds
Return, and father your sweet flocks to rest!
Though Heavenly signs depart, Heaven's purpose holds,

Where Earth's Redemption slumbers at my breast.
Look where He lies! Kiss ye His feet, and go!
Your Shepherd He: Whose sheep are ye, I know.

[*Now, as she speaks, one by one they advance and do homage, and return to their stations and kneel.*]

When mothers teach to babes their mother-tongue,
This tale shall first be told:
How to His birth ye came in days of old,
While starlight led and seraph-voices sung.
So, in that story, shall your names stay young.
Farewell; give thanks for this! Ye to Christ's fold
Are come. Take all the bliss that hearts on earth may hold!

[ALL *kneel in silence. The starlight fades, the stage darkens; only the light of the lantern remains. One by one,* Shepherds *and* Kings *rise, make a reverence toward the crib, cross themselves, and depart.* JOSEPH *closes the door after them. He lets down the curtains of the canopy over the sleeping* Mother *and* Child, *lays by the offerings with care, and sinks down wearily to rest. In the darkness the shining faces of* Angels *are seen watching: they disappear after* GABRIEL *has spoken to* JOSEPH. *Outside the* Shepherds *and* Kings *are heard singing till their voices die away in the distance.*]

SHEPHERDS AND KINGS [*Without*]

I heard on Christmas night
The loud bells ringing:
"New Life and Light
Christ comes bringing!"

CHORUS

Oh, that is true, is true,
And better could not be!
So God bless you!
And God bless me!

I heard on Christmas night
  The glad news pealing:
"Christ to human sight
  Now gives healing!"

  Oh, that is true, is true,
    And better could not be!
  So God bless you!
    And God bless me!

I heard on Christmas night
  The high Heavens telling:
"Christ, who left His height,
  On earth finds dwelling!"

  Oh, that is true, is true,
    And better could not be!
  So God bless you!
    And God bless me!

From Mary, Queen of Might,
  Comes down sweet saying:
"I hear, on Christmas night,
  All poor hearts praying!"

  Oh, that is true, is true,
    And better could not be!
  So God bless you!
    And God bless me!

[*Enter* Gabriel.]

Gabriel

Servant of God, sleep not, awake!
  Saddle the ass ere dawn of day;
The Mother, and the young Child take,
  Whom Herod seeketh now to slay;

Get thee hence ere the wakening bird
  Hath sung; to Egypt win thy way:
There, till I come and bring thee word,
  Shalt thou in hiding stay.
As thou hast heard, make haste, obey!

[*Exit* GABRIEL. JOSEPH *lies heavy with sleep; he stirs slowly and, with great pain rising, goes and kneels where* GABRIEL *has stood. Then he goes to the stable and makes ready, lading his beast and opening the doors which lead on from the further stable to the street. Then he returns and rouses* Our Lady *from rest.*]

JOSEPH

Mary, arise; hence must we go,
Even before the dawn of day.

MARY

It is God's will?

JOSEPH

'Tis even so:
His angel's word.

MARY

Which we obey.

[*They go out to the stable, whence presently the sound of hoofs going forth is heard. Bells are heard, and dawn begins to show. A stableman, carrying a lantern, stumbles in, heavy with sleep; he looks round surprised to find the place empty. Then on the ground he sees, for payment, three gold coins lying. A holy fear takes hold of him; he uncovers and kneels before the empty crib.*]

VOICES OF CAROL-SINGERS [*Without*]

God rest you, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay!
Because that Jesus Christ our Lord
Is born on Christmas Day!

CURTAIN

[*Enter* CHORUS.]

CHORUS

O Maid and Holy Child, where have ye gone?
Lost are the voices, sets the Star that shone:
Back to their folds have gone the shepherd-band:
Each king is now returned to his own land.
Love is gone forth into the world to win
Saints to their rest, and sinners back from sin.
Gentles, O ye that here have watched our play,
Tell me, I pray you, did He pass *your* way?
Say have ye Him safe, each one, in his breast?
Oh, hold Him well! So shall we all have rest.
The grace of Jesus Christ, who is our Lord,
The Love of God, the Holy Ghost's accord,
Be with us all! And Heaven be our reward!
Amen.

MAURICE'S OWN IDEA[1]

A Little Dream Play

BY

MILES MALLESON

Miles Malleson is rated high in England, both as an actor and as a playwright. He took the degree of Bachelor of Arts at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and, after a course at the Academy of Dramatic Art, London, began his professional work in the theater. In the World War he enlisted at the first call for volunteers, but soon was invalided home from Malta. Since then he has produced and published notable plays—long and short—which reveal a striking mastery of stage technique. *Paddly Pools*, a one-act play by him, is so finely suggestive, so touched with real imagination and delicacy that at its first production in London, in 1916, the critics proclaimed a discovery. Force and beauty are in almost everything he writes. His plays are fresh, frank, original, romantic, and look consciously to the future—a future in which he believes there will be a blending of beauty and good sense.

The lines of the "Little Dream Play," *Maurice's Own Idea*, are humorous, dainty, and wise. This exploration of the mind of a child is a delightful psychological fantasy.

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CHARACTERS

Maurice
The Great Idea
The Little Idea
First Fact
Second Fact
Third Fact
First Worker
Second Worker
Third Worker
Fourth Worker
First Idea
Second Idea
Third Idea
Fourth Idea
The Mother

MAURICE'S OWN IDEA

Scene I

The stage is hung in curtains. It represents a night-nursery. You know it represents a night-nursery, because, as you look on the stage, there is a little bed on your right, and a table with toys upon it, somewhere about the center. A candle burns on the table. The bed, parallel to the footlights, has its head close up against the curtains; and there is a little table by the head of the bed on the further side from the audience. Otherwise the room is empty except for a child.

The child, in pyjamas, is kneeling by the bed—his back to the audience. His feet are bare and it would be lovely to tickle the soles of them (except that the footlights are there, and perhaps it wouldn't be quite the proper time to do it. However): a huge black doll, and a tiny white doll, both of the Gollywog tribe, have been placed against the bed beside him.

Maurice. And, please, make it rain very, very hard tomorrow, so I shan't have to go to school. [*He rises.*] There. That's that. [*He lifts up the huge doll.*] Now all we can do is to hope for the best. [*With the huge black doll in his arms he goes to an opening of the curtains, at the back, and suddenly yells through it, in an amazingly loud voice.*] Mother! . . . [*No answer.*] . . . Daddy! . . . [*No answer*] . . . Much too busy stuffing themselves! [*You would have thought that he couldn't shout any louder, but he can, and does.*] Mother!!! . . . Daddy!!!! . . . [*Getting no response, he turns and comes toward the table.*] That's 'cos there's a silly old party on. [*He addresses the huge black doll.*] Philip! [*Philip is the huge black doll.*] There's a silly old party on downstairs, and they've forgotten us. . . . Where's Phyllis? [*Phyllis is the tiny*

white doll.] Philip! what have you done with Phyllis? [*He searches round, and eventually discovers the tiny white doll, still by the bed.*] Oh, there she is—still saying her prayers. Come on, Phyllis. [*He lifts her up.*] You needn't pretend you're as good as all that, 'cos you're not. They've forgotten us. Just because I was allowed to go down for one minute before I undressed they think they can leave me to put myself to bed. . . . It happened the last time. It's getting a bit thick. I shall have to put my foot down. . . . Philip, you *do* look cross. I don't see why *you* should be. What's the matter? Tell me . . . out with it . . . tell me. [*He assumes an extraordinarily gruff voice, supposed to be Philip's.*] "A little boy who is invited downstairs to a party to say good-night ought to have taken his best friend with him." Oh, that's it, is it? Old cross-patch! Phyllis isn't cross. Oh, Phyllis, I believe you are —after spending ten minutes over your prayers, too! . . . Are you? Whisper . . . are you? [*He holds the doll close to his ear and assumes an extraordinarily squeaky voice, supposed to be Phyllis's.*] "Yes." Well, you *are* a nice couple! I tell you what I'll do. If you sit on the table, I'll tell you all about it. [*He sets them on the table.*] That's right. Now . . . let's pretend the table's the party. . . . Philip, sit still, don't tease! Listen! Now, that table's the party, and I come in at the door. [*He dances to the door, disappears, and makes an entrance, acting his party manners as he walks delicately to the table. He stops acting to explain the situation, apparently without taking breath.*] Mummy's there and Daddy's there and a fat man there and a thin man there and a beautiful lady there with diamonds in her hair and a pink young man next to her, and he kept looking at her and got pinker and missed eating ever so many things and I come in. [*Breath gives out. He retires a little and starts acting party manners again, but makes another breathless addition to his explanation.*] And there were crackers and I pulled one with all of them and I got all the presents 'cos they didn't know where to put their thumbs and there are the presents. They aren't presents really—they're *facts.* I don't know what it means but I'll explain. This is the first one.

See? [*He lifts it up to show Philip and Phyllis.*] A teeny weeny money-box. When it rattles that's a thruppenny bit . . . 'course it wasn't there at first, but the fat man put it in. We pulled the cracker—and 'course I got the present—and the fat man put in a thruppenny bit. Now I'm the fat man. [*He gives an imitation.*] "It's no good if there isn't any money in it—there's a Fact for you," and he gave it to me.

And this is the second one. See? [*He lifts it up.*] A teeny weeny gun. The thin man was there, and we pulled the cracker—and 'course I got the present—and the thin man said, "Now you've got something in the money-box, you'll want this—there's another Fact for you"—and he gave it to me.

And this is the third—a teeny weeny fairy. See? [*He lifts it up.*] The pink young man was there and we pulled—and 'course I got the present—and the young man whispered something to the beautiful lady and went pink all over and the beautiful lady said: "Hush! that's the Unmen-shun-able Fact." So 'course I listened. And the Un-men-shun-able Fact was that there are no fairies. So there they are. Three presents—only they're really facts . . . and now I'm going to bed . . . Philip, if you're good you can carry the candle like Daddy does. [*He puts Philip's arms round the candlestick and carries it to the little table by the head of the bed.*] There. And Phyllis can turn down the bed, like Mummy does. [*He makes Phyllis turn down the bedclothes.*] There . . . you there . . . you there. [*He puts the two dolls into bed.*] Me here. [*He gets in between them.*] Oh, there's one thing I forgot to tell. Just when I was going out of the door I heard Mummy say I was a little boy with ideas of my own. . . . I thought you'd like to know. . . . [*He blows out the candle.*] Oh, Golly, it's all dark! . . . Good-night, Philip. [*Then, tremendously gruff*] Good-night. . . . Good-night, Phyllis. [*Then, tremendously squeaky*] Good-nigh-eeeeet.

[*Darkness and silence.*]

Scene II

For a moment it is dark. Then, curiously, a little ray of green light quivers into the room. A ray of blue creeps in after it. Very, very faintly, music sounds. The lights mingle, and unfold and spread like clouds of wreathing smoke, and the music, as if it were borne in on the light, swells gradually more loud. . . .

Something is in the room. A little figure is moving quickly in and out of the coloring shadows. A quaintly joyous little tune catches the ear. The little figure might be creating the music as it dances, or dancing to the music that it hears. The joyous little tune disappears into some deep-sounding chords. Brighter, clearer rays of green and blue strike into the center of the stage; the music swells, like a breath of passing wind . . . and a tall figure is standing in the arch of clear light. The little figure, running to the tall figure, bows before it.

Maurice. [*Sitting up in bed*] What is it? . . . Who are you?

[*The* Little Figure *runs up to the bed.*]

The Little Figure. Sssssh! Don't talk too loud . . . a great Idea is in the room.

Maurice. A what?

The Little Idea. A great Idea. I'm only a little idea—but that's a great idea. I'm only a little idea, but I'm going to grow up a great idea. . . . Don't you want to grow up something great?

Maurice. I'm always being told I've got to grow a good little boy.

The Little Idea. Oooooh! I don't want to grow up just a *good* idea. There are plenty of good ideas about—but not many great ones. I'm going to grow up a great idea.

The Great Idea. Maurice!

The Little Idea. Ssssh! Listen! It's talking to you.

The Great Idea. Maurice, come here to me.

Maurice. I'm frightened.

The Little Idea. I know. Great ideas are terrifying, but the first thing you've got to learn is not to be terrified—that's awfully important. . . . Come with me.

[MAURICE *jumps out of bed. The* LITTLE IDEA *takes him by the hand, and leads him to the* GREAT IDEA.]

THE GREAT IDEA. Do you remember the last thing you heard your mother say, before you went to sleep?

MAURICE. Please, Mummy said . . . Mummy said . . .

THE LITTLE IDEA. [*Whispering*] You mustn't be frightened.

MAURICE. Mummy said, I was a little boy with ideas of my own.

THE GREAT IDEA. We have come to take care of you. . . . I have come to see your three presents. . . . Will you show them to me?

MAURICE. 'Course I will.

THE GREAT IDEA. Bring them to me . . . one by one.

MAURICE. [*As he fetches the first one from the table*] They aren't presents, really—they're *Facts*. I don't know what it means, but that's what they said downstairs. [*He has returned to the* GREAT IDEA.] This is the first. A money-box. When it rattles, that's a thruppenny bit, 'cos the man said it wasn't any good if there wasn't any money in it.

[*The* GREAT IDEA *puts out a hand for it, and* MAURICE *gives it up. The* GREAT IDEA *raises an arm slowly, holding the present high.*]

THE GREAT IDEA. "Here is a thing, and a very pretty thing, and to whom belongs this pretty thing?"

MAURICE. Please, it's mine!

THE LITTLE IDEA. Ssssssssh! Don't talk. Something's going to happen.

THE GREAT IDEA. [*Repeating*] "To whom belongs this pretty thing?"

[*A little man, about* MAURICE'S *size, hurries on. He has a top hat, a large stomach, white spats, a fat gold watch chain, and an enormous cigar. He goes straight to* MAURICE, *ignoring the others, and shakes hands warmly.*]

1ST FACT. How dee do? How dee do? Sorry I'm late—kept in the City. Very glad to see you again, my little man, very glad.

MAURICE. Was it you gave me the thruppenny bit?

1ST FACT. I gave you the thruppenny.

MAURICE. Thank you very much.

1ST FACT. Oh, that's nothing! That's nothing! Nothing at all! Do you know, there's nothing in the world I couldn't give you—if I wanted to give it to you. . . . That surprises you, eh? . . . It's a fact. [*He sticks his fingers in his waistcoat and his cigar in the corner of his mouth. . . . His gaze lights on the* TWO IDEAS. *He eyes them. Then he takes* MAURICE *confidentially aside.*] I say; who *are* these people. . . . D'you know 'em?

MAURICE. I think they're Ideas.

1ST FACT. You think they're WHAT?

MAURICE. I think they're Ideas.

1ST FACT. [*Eying them again*] Oh! . . . I don't know 'em. Don't want to, much. Never saw anything like 'em before . . . very queer. Very queer indeed. Cranks, I expect. Have a cigar?

MAURICE. No, thanks.

1ST FACT. Half-a-crown apiece.

MAURICE. No, thanks.

THE GREAT IDEA. Bring me the second present.

[MAURICE *fetches it from the table.*]

MAURICE. [*As he hands it to the* GREAT IDEA] There it is.

THE GREAT IDEA. [*As before*] "Here is a thing, and a very pretty thing, and to whom belongs this pretty thing?"

[*Immediately there enters another diminutive person in a gorgeous and rather grotesque uniform such as was certainly never seen anywhere before. He too goes straight up to* MAURICE.]

2D FACT. Well, my lad, how are you? Stand up straight when you answer. HO WAREYOU?

MAURICE. I beg your pardon.

2D FACT. Don't argue about it. HO WAREYOU?

MAURICE. Very well, thank you.

2D FACT. That's right.

MAURICE. Did you give me the little gun?

2D FACT. I did.

MAURICE. I didn't know you were a soldier.

2D FACT. I'm not a soldier. I'm a newspaper editor—but there's something fascinating to me about the uniform. How does it fit? Smart, eh? [*He puffs out his chest and turns himself round for inspection.*] See these? [*He points to two huge stars on his breast.*] Ha! you may well stare. I gave myself two new orders this morning. Must impress people, y'know. [*He sees the* 1ST FACT, *and dashes at him to shake hands.*] Hullo, old fellah! how are you? Didn't see you at the Club today. Heard such a good thing at lunch. Jenkins—you know old Jenkins—bankers—they own "The Earth," too—he said. . . . Here, come over here.

[*They go aside; the rest of the story is whispered, but the two* FACTS *roar with laughter.*]

THE GREAT IDEA. Bring me the third present.

MAURICE. [*As he does so*] Here it is. It's a fairy.

THE GREAT IDEA. [*As before*] "Here is a thing, and a very pretty thing, and to whom belongs this pretty thing?"

[*A schoolboy in an Eton suit comes on. He goes straight up to* MAURICE.]

3D FACT. I say, I'm beastly sorry to give you such a silly rotten present. Of course I didn't know there was only a silly rotten fairy in it. Silly rotten crackers, too. There's a chap in our form can make a noise twice as loud as that with his mouth. [*He sees the other two* FACTS.] Hullo, I know them! They came and gave away the prizes at our school. Crikey, they didn't half make speeches either! Decent chaps, though—got us a half-holiday. [*He joins them.*]

THE GREAT IDEA. Maurice, come here to me.

[MAURICE *goes to the* GREAT IDEA. *The* LITTLE IDEA *has all the time kept close to the* GREAT IDEA. *The* THREE FACTS *are in a group apart.*]

THE GREAT IDEA. Here are your three presents; and there are the three Facts you did not understand. The name of the first Fact

is: It's-No-Good-If-There-Isn't-Any-Money-In-It. . . . And the name of the second is: Might-is-Right. . . . And the name of the third is There-Are-No-Fairies. . . . [*The* GREAT IDEA *speaks to the* LITTLE IDEA.] Go and tell them I am going to take them all to Fairyland.

[*The* LITTLE IDEA *runs up to the* FACTS.]

THE LITTLE IDEA. Gentlemen, I have been told to inform you that we are all going to be taken to Fairyland.

3D FACT. Is that meant to be funny? There's a chap in our form says things twice as funny as that. He makes me roar with laughter. [*He sits down.*]

1ST FACT. Fairyland, Fairyland, Fairyland??? Wasn't old Jenkins talking about it at the Club? Oh, no! That was another place—Oil, I believe.

2D FACT. [*Consulting a wrist watch with a magnificent gesture.*] How long does it take to get there?

THE GREAT IDEA. Some reach it in the drawing of a breath. For some it lies across the weary desert of the years.

1ST FACT. Desert? Sounds like Africa. Rich country, in parts.

2D FACT. I must get back to the office soon. I'm a busy man, y'know.

THE GREAT IDEA. That is why you have forgotten where Fairyland is.

2D FACT. I dare say. It doesn't take long to forget what you learn at school.

3D FACT. Thanks! They don't teach silly rot like that at *our* school. Latin's futile; but I'm jolly good at History. William the Conqueror ten sixty six. I know all the dates when the kings died. There's a chap in our form can say them without taking breath. He was sick once doing it.

1ST FACT. Any natural wealth in this place of yours?

THE GREAT IDEA. All the wealth of the world comes from there.

1ST FACT. [*Aside to the* 2D FACT] Wants to float a company. . . . [*To the* GREAT IDEA] What's the place produce?

THE GREAT IDEA. Dreams, and Understanding, and all that makes life valuable.

1ST FACT. [*Again to the* 2D FACT] The whole thing sounds fishy. . . . What do *you* say?

2D FACT. I don't suppose they know how to govern themselves. We might annex it.

1ST FACT. Well, of course, if you go, I go. [*To the* LITTLE IDEA] Say we'll go.

MAURICE. Is there really such a place as Fairyland?

THE GREAT IDEA. It is known by many, many names; and you often find it where you least expect, but there is really such a place.

MAURICE. Is it a big place?

THE GREAT IDEA. So big that no human being has ever traveled from end to end.

MAURICE. How do you get there?

THE GREAT IDEA. There are many roads. You may float there on a song. You may see the way opening wonderfully before you in the eyes of a friend. The great gates may roll back for you on a night of stars. There is a great road of suffering that leads there, and a great road of joy. . . . Do you really want to come with me?

MAURICE. Please, I want to come with you ever, ever so much.

THE GREAT IDEA. Then I will tell you a secret. Come close to me. Give me your hand. . . . Look into my eyes.

[*As he does so,* MAURICE *gives a tiny little cry.*]

THE LITTLE IDEA. [*Taking his other hand, and whispering*] Don't be frightened.

THE GREAT IDEA. [*Speaking slowly*] This is the secret. Remember. This . . . The simplest way to get to Fairyland is to turn round in your sleep. . . .

[*It is suddenly quite dark. The music swells . . . in a little while it sinks again and seems to come from a long way off. The darkness is broken by a strange white light on* MAURICE'S *bed, where he sleeps peacefully. His head is turned to the audience and his hair*

is all ruffled on the pillow, but he is utterly at rest, breathing regularly. . . . He stirs in his sleep—and then turns over in his bed. The light fades out from around him and all is quite dark again.]

Scene III

After a moment of darkness, light begins to steal back; faintly at first—red and gold and amber. We are looking onto the stage, as it were, from the opposite direction. The Great Idea *and the* Little Idea, Maurice *and the* Three Facts, *relatively in the same positions as they were in the previous scene, now have their backs to us. But between us and them are now five fairy people—three* Workers *are seated on the ground in a circle of light, and two* Ideas, *apart, apparently asleep.*

Maurice. You see, I can't possibly turn round in my sleep, 'cos I'm wide-awake. . . . Oh!!! [*He points off the stage.*] There's the tree at the bottom of our garden—and there's the wood where I'm not allowed to go. . . . Then this must be the little field where the fairy rings are. [*He turns round to look for the rings and sees the fairy people.*] Good gracious! Look at those! . . . But this can't be Fairyland; this is the little field at the back of our house.

The Great Idea. It's a little corner of Fairyland, too. It's just here that the country of the dreams borders on the country of the ideas.

1st Worker. [*Suddenly*] I've got five million, five thousand, five hundred and seventy-two dewdrops to get ready by this evening; the sun's sending to fetch them. I shall never get them done—can anybody help me?

2d Worker. I can't. I've written a new song for a blackbird—only I simply cannot get the end right. And he wants it to sing when the last stick is put into his nest.

3d Worker. He told me about it. He's been practicing his exercises all the morning for his chest notes.

1ST WORKER. It's all very well, but he never did a stroke of work in the nest.

2D WORKER. He wants to sing about it all the same.

4TH WORKER. [*Entering*] The spider at the end of the lane's giving a party. He wants some more dewdrops. Five thousand of the biggest.

1ST WORKER. That's done it.

2D WORKER. Where are all the others? They'll help you.

1ST WORKER. They promised to. But the wind heard some music as he came across the sea and he thinks it'll suit him; so they've all gone up into the tree-tops to teach the leaves their parts.

3D WORKER. The wind does sing some of the sea music very well. I heard him last night.

1ST WORKER. I shan't get them done— that's all.

4TH WORKER. You'll catch it—the Sun's in a terrible state.

1ST WORKER. What's the matter with him?

4TH WORKER. Oh, my dear! I've never known him in such a blaze. He's come across ever such a strange cloud that can turn itself inside out—and he wants a special sunset arranged for it.

2D WORKER. What sort of a sunset?

4TH WORKER. That's the trouble; he doesn't really know what he wants himself. . . . He declares he had the same sort of effect four days after the world was created.

3D WORKER. Well, can't you find out who did it for him then?

4TH WORKER. He's so vague. He's just burning with excitement. He says he's sure it was four days after *something* was created—but he can't remember what.

MAURICE. Please, may I go closer?

[*The* GREAT IDEA *leads* MAURICE *closer.*]

THE GREAT IDEA. These are the Workers. They are always busy creating all that is beautiful.

MAURICE. [*Pointing to the two who are asleep*] Please, who are those?

THE GREAT IDEA. Those are two ideas. They go to and fro from here into the minds of men. It is theirs to carry the meaning of

creation into the world. It's a tough job. There's a hospital round the corner full of tired ideas, that can't make an impression—but they soon get strong again here.

[*Two* IDEAS *enter. The two who were resting at once wake up.*]

1ST IDEA. What success?

2D IDEA. [*With tremendous enthusiasm*] Oh, a splendid, splendid day! We heard the music the wind learnt from the sea, and I went down to my man. I found him in an attic, pacing up and down, up and down. The floor was littered with paper, and the agony of striving was in his eyes—and I sang it to him—and he understood. He understood.

[*The* 3D IDEA, *that has just entered with the* 2D, *sinks to its knees with a cry of despair.*]

He sat down at his desk and he put it down as I sang it to him.

4TH IDEA. And you?

3D IDEA. [*Utterly dejected*] I went down to my man, and I found him in a great drawing-room, and I sang it to him,—and he went to the piano, and . . . [*The* IDEA'S *voice breaks.*] . . . He's making a waltz tune of it!!!

[*All this time the* FACTS *have remained as they were in the previous scene—the* 1ST *and* 2D FACT *in conversation, and the* 3D FACT *seated; and they have had their backs to the audience.*]

1ST FACT. I'm a man of the world, AND I *KNOW*—there's no such place as Fairyland.

[*They turn round and see the fairy people.*]

1ST FACT. Hullo! A picnic! They've got no right here.

[*They advance to the fairy people.*]

2D FACT. Are you aware you're trespassing?

1ST FACT. I know the man who owns all this.

2D FACT. It's our duty to inform him.

[*They link arms and start to leave the stage; but they can't find the way; they hesitate, try another way, and evi-*

dently become bewildered. The 3D FACT *goes up to the group of* IDEAS.]

3D FACT. Hullo!

1ST IDEA. Hullo!

3D FACT. There's a chap in our form with a face just like yours, —he's an awful fool,—he plays the violin. . . . Where do you go to school?

2D IDEA. Everywhere.

3D FACT. Where's everywhere?

3D IDEA. All over Fairyland.

3D FACT. Fairyland? [*He looks round him, puzzled.*] Crikey! Is this Fairyland?

4TH IDEA. A little bit of it.

1ST IDEA. What's your name?

3D FACT. My name's "There-Are-No . . .!!!" No. I shan't tell you my name.

1ST IDEA. [*All the* IDEAS *together gathering round him*] Oh, yes.

2D IDEA. Please tell us your name.

3D IDEA. Please tell us.

4TH IDEA. I would like to know.

3D FACT. I shan't . . . makes a fellow feel a fool. [*He escapes from them.*]

1ST FACT. Thought I knew my way—very strange.

2D FACT. There's something very queer about this—very queer.

[*They return to the* WORKERS, and the 1ST FACT *catches sight of some dewdrops.*]

1ST FACT. Hullo—what have you got there?

1ST WORKER. [*Holding one up in his fingers, and showing it off, proudly*] See! A little gem in each.

1ST FACT. By Jove! . . . I'll have some of these. [*He produces an enormous check book.*]

1ST WORKER. The best place for them will be at the end of the lane.

1ST FACT. You'd better send them to my city address. [*He gives the puzzled fairy a card.*] What d'you want for the lot—

1st Worker. I'm glad you think they're beautiful; I made them for that . . . but . . .

2d Fact. Don't haggle!

1st Fact. [*Being businesslike*] I don't think much of 'em—probably fakes—but I'll take a few for myself.

1st Worker. But you can't take them for yourself.

1st Fact. What d'you mean? *Can't!* I can afford to pay for 'em.

1st Worker. I do not understand.

1st Fact. Mad, or wrong 'uns.

2d Fact. You leave this to me. . . . Look here . . . suppose someone stronger than you came and took 'em . . . what then?

1st Worker. They would not sparkle in the sun any the less; they would not hang less beautifully from the grass; they would not make the spider's web less splendid; they would not be less fresh for the birds to drink. I do not understand.

2d Fact. The thing's perfectly simple. You've got 'em—they're *yours*; a bigger fellar takes 'em—they're *his*.

1st Worker. I do not understand.

2d Worker. There is nothing here in which all may not share alike.

2d Fact. Nonsense!

1st Fact. Wicked nonsense!

2d Fact. Worse. Dangerous nonsense!

1st Fact. [*In a great rage*] They're stolen goods. I'll have the police on 'em. That's the way to deal with these people . . . Police! . . . where are the police?

2d Fact. [*In an equally great rage—to the fairy people*] I'll get public opinion against you. I'll start a campaign in the Press.

1st Fact. [*Who has made another unsuccessful attempt to find his way off the stage*] Police! Police! . . . [*He returns to the* 2d Fact.] There aren't any police about. There's something horribly queer about this place.

2D FACT. [*Turning round like a tee-to-tum and losing his head*] I don't know where I *am*.

1ST FACT. [*Losing his head, too*] I feel helpless.

2D FACT. There's something here I can't get *at*!

THE GREAT IDEA. [*In a voice that silences the* FACTS] And therein lies the hope of the world. You may scorn men, you may cast them out, you may break their bodies . . . even to death—but their ideas live here. Here are the things you cannot get at.

1ST FACT. [*Furious*] You brought us here—get us out of this place!

THE GREAT IDEA. [*In a great voice—lifting an arm*] You may go.

[*Immediately the stage is black; music swells again into the blackness.*]

SCENE IV

Then a background of azure blue begins to shine at the back of the stage.

(*The curtains at the back can be drawn aside, and behind them a light cloth can be hung, upon which the color can be thrown.*)

The rest of the stage remains in darkness; so that the two figures,—of MAURICE, *and of the* GREAT IDEA,—*raised a little above the level of the stage, are outlined dark against the shining color. . . . The music sinks, and again seems to come from very far away.*

MAURICE. Oh, look! I can see the wood, where I'm not allowed to go—quite plain from here. Please, you took me to Fairyland; will you take me into the wood?

THE GREAT IDEA. There I cannot take you.

MAURICE. Why can't you take me?

THE GREAT IDEA. There is the very depth and heart of Fairyland. Some there are in the world who have remained true to their ideals. Those, and those only, find their way into the wood.

MAURICE. [*Gazing down into the light*] I can hear music coming from it.

THE GREAT IDEA. The peace that is there passes beyond the knowledge of those who have not entered.

MAURICE. I should be frightened. . . . Philip's my best friend. When I go into the wood, may I take Philip with me?

THE GREAT IDEA. It is one of the few places where Fear is not. Those that go there, go alone—yet there is no loneliness. No word is spoken, no greeting exchanged, but every spirit knows wonderfully the presence of its fellows.

MAURICE. How shall I find my way there?

THE GREAT IDEA. It is not found by those who set out to find it; it is the supreme gain of those who seek no gain.

MAURICE. But, please, how shall I know the way?

THE GREAT IDEA. Often and often the ways will divide before you. Sometimes you will have no doubt which way to take; sometimes you will know, but it will be hard to take it; sometimes you will not even know which way it lies, and then, after you have traveled far, you may have to struggle back.

MAURICE. It's getting dark. Are you going away? . . . Please don't go away!

THE GREAT IDEA. I shall not go beyond your reach. I am an Idea; and I am yours.

MAURICE. Are you my very own idea?

THE GREAT IDEA. I am your very own idea.

MAURICE. Like Mummy's my very own Mummy, and Philip's my very best friend?

THE GREAT IDEA. I am your own idea. Amid all the voices of the world, listen to *my* voice—deep and deep within you.

MAURICE. Oh, I will listen and listen and listen—and then I'll find my way into the wood.

THE GREAT IDEA. Then you will find your way into the wood.

[*The light fades out, and the stage is black again . . . the music seems to come into the room—perhaps from the very wood itself.*]

SCENE V

A VOICE. [*Calling softly in the darkness*] Maurice! . . . Maurice!!

[A GROWN-UP—MAURICE'S *mother—tiptoes into the room. She carries a night-light. She goes to the bed, and the light sheds onto the sleeping child.*]

MAURICE. [*In his sleep*] Are you my very own idea? . . . Like Mummy's my very own Mummy, and Philip's my very best friend?

[*A little cry escapes from the* GROWN-UP. *She bends over* MAURICE.]

THE GROWN-UP. [*Speaking very softly*] My little boy! . . . What queer ideas are in your head! . . . your own ideas! . . .

MAURICE. Oh, I will listen and listen and listen—and then I'll find my way into the wood.

THE GROWN-UP. My darling! [*She stoops and kisses him.*]

[*Then she tiptoes from the room, leaving the night-light thrusting its yellow fingers into the shadows.*]

CURTAIN

THE CRUMBS THAT FALL[1]

BY

PHILIP HUBBARD

With his British background, Philip Hubbard came to the United States in 1916. He is now an American citizen. The World War diverted him from things theatrical. However, in 1915, he managed a three-days leave from Flanders to see his original comedy *Victoria and Albert* produced at Miss Horniman's Repertory Theater at Manchester. Another early play, still continuing in England, is an adaptation of *The Barrier*, by Rex Beach. Mr. Hubbard's early American experience was in Washington, where he wrote war sketches and a serial for the *Saturday Evening Post*. He has since worked in pictures at Hollywood, toured as a professional actor, or played with the company of a permanent repertory theater. Through these exacting contacts with the stage, Mr. Hubbard has contrived to continue his creative writing,—mostly for the movies and the magazines. "Lockhart North" is frequently used by him as a pen name.

Good all-male-character comedies are rare. As such, *The Crumbs that Fall* is distinctive and has proved its worth on the professional stage in England. The individual reactions to an embarrassing episode among a group of men in a smart London Club has offered the author an opportunity for a keen observation of human nature.

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CHARACTERS

DENNY KEEGAN, *a company promoter*	*members and founders of the Stragglers' Club*
STEVE SUTTON	
ARTHUR CAVANAGH	
NAT GOLDING	
BOBBY BLAND	
DICK SOPWITH	

Extra Gentlemen (*to any convenient number*), *members of the Club*
PERRY, *head waiter at the Club*
2D WAITER

THE CRUMBS THAT FALL

SCENE: *Part of the dining-room of the Stragglers' Club, Piccadilly, on the evening of Founders' dinner. There is a long table C., running lengthways across the stage. There is a window at back C., with curtains drawn; a door, R.; sideboards, R. and L. of window at back; fire, L.*

As the curtain rises there are seated at the table: back of table, facing audience, from R. to L., ARTHUR CAVANAGH, Extra Gent, NAT GOLDING, DICK SOPWITH; *at head of table, L.,* STEVE SUTTON; *at foot of table, R.,* DENNY KEEGAN; *front of table, backs to audience, from R. to L.,* BOBBY BLAND, Extra Gent, Extra Gent, Extra Gent.

All the men are in dinner jackets. GOLDING'S *clothes are not too well cut. The remainder of the named characters are all smart Club men of the present day—well turned out.* KEEGAN *is a bronzed, healthy-looking man of about forty. The other named characters are all men of thirty-eight to forty-five,* SUTTON *being the eldest. The* Extra Gentlemen *are younger men—say, twenty-eight to thirty.* PERRY, *the head waiter of the Club, stands at back, R. of sideboard.*

SUTTON. [*To* PERRY] Perry, will you bring coffee and cigars, please.

PERRY. Yes, sir.

[*Exit R. door.*]

CAVANAGH. [*To* KEEGAN] Well, Denny, how does it feel to be a millionaire?

KEEGAN. Blamed if I can tell you. I don't feel much difference; I've still got two legs and only one tummy to fill—all I know is that I've had a good feed and I'm jolly glad to be back here with you fellers.

BLAND. We're jolly glad to see you back, old man.

[PERRY, *carrying salver with cigar and cigarette boxes and followed by* 2d Waiter *with coffee tray, enters.*]

CAVANAGH. [*Helping himself to coffee*] When did you land?

KEEGAN. Last Thursday.

CAVANAGH. Tilbury?

KEEGAN. No, Liverpool. I came across to Vancouver from Sydney and then by the C. P. R.—it's quicker than the Red Sea if you hit off the boat, and I wanted to see Canada.

BLAND. What d'you think of Canada?

KEEGAN. Don't know anything about it. What I saw from the train looked a jolly good place to stay away from. [*He helps himself to coffee and a cigarette.*]

PERRY. [*To* SUTTON] Anything further, sir?

SUTTON. Are the glasses filled?

PERRY. Yes, sir.

SUTTON. Nothing more, Perry.

PERRY. Thank you, sir.

[2D Waiter *exit with coffee tray.* PERRY *goes to sideboard, arranges decanters, and exit. As* PERRY *closes the door,* SUTTON, *glass in hand, rises.*]

BLAND. [*To* CAVANAGH] There goes old Steve—the hardy annual speech—he's a shockin' old bore—shoot it off, Steve.

KEEGAN. Bravo, Steve. Wake me up when he's through.

SUTTON. Gentlemen!

BLAND. Hear, hear!

CAVANAGH. Shut up, Bobby! [*To* KEEGAN] I say! What's the matter with Nat Golding?

KEEGAN. Search me! The beggar looks half-starved—just had a good feed, too.

SOPWITH. Order! Silence!

BLAND. Hear, hear!

SUTTON. Gentlemen.

BLAND. Go on, you've said that before.

CAVANAGH. Shut up, Bobby!

SUTTON. Gentlemen! As you know, I am not a good speaker—

BLAND. Rotten! Hear, hear!

SUTTON. But—in spite of the continual interruptions—I don't want to name no names, but if the gentleman who spoke last wants a thick ear, he's only got to say so!

OMNES. Bravo, Steve.

KEEGAN. Got it in the neck, Bobby!

CAVANAGH. Shut up! Get on, Steve.

SUTTON. Well, gentlemen, we meet once more in the old Stragglers with another year behind us—a year, I hope, to our credit—

OMNES. Hear, hear!

SUTTON. And if I may be allowed to say so, this year's dinner is one which we shall all remember as being the auspicious occasion which brings our dear old friend Denny Keegan back to his country again—

OMNES. Hear, hear!

SUTTON. I think you'll all agree with me that he has been absent too often from the Founders' dinner, and with me you will express the very sincere hope that next year, and in all the years to come, we shall see his cheery face beaming at us from the end of the table on Founders' night.

OMNES. Hear, hear!

SUTTON. Gentlemen—I give you the health of Denny Keegan.

OMNES. Keegan! Cheer'o, old chap!

[*They drink.* SUTTON *sits.*]

BLAND. Now, Denny, up on your hind legs.

KEEGAN. Oh, I say, you chaps,—let's give it a miss. Oh, well, I suppose I must then. [*Rises.*]

OMNES. Hear, hear! Speak up, Denny!

KEEGAN. My dear old pals, I'm not going to call you gentlemen—I've known you too long—

OMNES. Shame!

KEEGAN. And now that everything that can hire a motor car and buy a yachting cap calls itself a gentleman, there ain't much in it—so I say again—my dear old pals—I can't tell you how delighted I

am to be amongst you again, but there's just one thing that hits me, as I expect it hits all of you—that out of the twenty good friends who started this club there are only five here tonight. Some of us are scattered over the old globe and can't get here every year, and some of us, worse luck, have set out on a longer journey than any of us here have ever started on—but they're not forgotten, God rest 'em!—Dear old fellows, I give you the old toast as the last for to-night—Absent friends—alive or dead—may it fare well with them.

OMNES. Hear, hear! Absent friends.

[*They drink.* KEEGAN *sits. The various men turn to one another in twos and threes, drawing their chairs nearer together and talking among themselves.*]

BLAND. Well, well! Now, Denny—I want to hear all about your wanderings.

[GOLDING *alone sits moodily aloof, staring straight in front of him.*]

CAVANAGH. Yes, spin us the yarn, Denny—we all want to hear about things.

KEEGAN. There ain't a lot to tell—I was swept up on a wave of prosperity after being on my uppers in Callao—I don't suppose any of you chaps know what it is to go hungry when you've got a shocking appetite—I do, and I tell you I don't like it.

[GOLDING *looks up and fixes his eyes on* KEEGAN.]

BLAND. No—I've been hungry of course— but there's always been Princes or the Troc handy to fall into—I did once have to fall back to something cheaper—at the end of a quarter—still, take it by and large, we're the lucky ones.

GOLDING. Lucky!

CAVANAGH. Hullo, Nat! Woken up at last, you haven't spoken three words this evening; ain't you well?

GOLDING. I'm all right.

BLAND. Go on, Denny, I want to hear about your luck.

KEEGAN. It wasn't so much luck as blamed obstinacy. I had a lot of options on rubber plantations all through Peru. It was getting them and holding on to 'em that sent me broke—but I had a

hunch there was going to be a boom, so I hung on and went hungry cheerfully.

BLAND. Well, what happened?

KEEGAN. I pulled it off, that's all; and here I am, and pretty well, thank you.

CAVANAGH. Why didn't you come home when you'd made your pile? What took you down to the Pacific?

KEEGAN. Same game, the boom will set down that direction next year as sure as little apples; but you chaps take my tip, don't go buying rubber till I give you the nod.

BLAND. We won't. By the way, didn't you go to Ceylon?

KEEGAN. Just touched it, stayed in Colombo a couple of weeks and fossicked around.

CAVANAGH. Do any good?

KEEGAN. No, that ground was covered long before I got there. The Pacific was what I had my eye on; I've got my fist on it, too, now. You watch out for Pacific Plantations Limited.

BLAND. By Jove, we will!

KEEGAN. By the way, I said I didn't do any good in Colombo—all the same I did.

BLAND. What was it?

KEEGAN. Just a fluke, nothing I was out for, but my luck was in and I couldn't go wrong. I happened on Colombo just at the time the shell-auctions were on.

SUTTON. What on earth are shell-auctions?

KEEGAN. Pearl. The fishery's government monopoly down there, and they work it that way.

BLAND. What way?

KEEGAN. Government looks after the banks and keeps the merry poacher off and, when the season's on, sends the divers down to fetch up the shell.

CAVANAGH. What then?

KEEGAN. They sell the shell by auction—you buy the clams in lots and chance whether there's anything in 'em. It's a regular gamble and of course most of the stuff goes to the dealer's ring,

but when they've got all they want everyone has a lot or two just for luck, so I had a cut in.

BLAND. What did you get?

KEEGAN. I got twenty clams for fourteen rupees. Nineteen of 'em were blanks, but number twenty had this in it. [*He produces a small case from his pocket, opens it, and displays a fine black pearl.*]

CAVANAGH. By Jove! That's a whacker.

KEEGAN. Pretty thing, ain't it? [*Hands it to* CAVANAGH *in the case.*]

CAVANAGH. [*Examining it*] By Jove! What did you say you gave for it?

KEEGAN. Cost me fourteen rupees, about eighteen bob. But it's a good 'un.

BLAND. I should say it is. What's it worth?

KEEGAN. I refused three hundred for it yesterday.

[GOLDING *edges closer and stares at the pearl.*]

Pass it around, Cavvy, let the other chaps see it. If there's anyone here fancies a black pearl, this one's going dirt cheap at five hundred.

[CAVANAGH *passes case to man next him.*]

BLAND. Don't mind owing you five hundred for it. I'd rather owe it to you all my life than do you out of it.

[*The man next to* CAVANAGH *passes the case to* GOLDING, *who stares at it.* SOPWITH, *next to him, puts out a hand to take it from him.*]

SOPWITH. Let's have a dekko at it.

[*The electric light fails suddenly. The room is left quite dark, except for a slight red glow from the fire.*]

SUTTON. Here, I say! Who blew out the light? Perry! Waiter!

[BLAND *strikes a match.*]

[PERRY *enters, holding a lighted taper.*]

Perry, what the devil's the matter with the lights?

PERRY. Gone out, sir.

SUTTON. Yes, I gathered that. Why?

PERRY. Very sorry, sir. Fuse blowed, sir, won't be half a tick, sir. 'Enery's just putting another in, sir.

[*The lights go up.*]

All right now, sir.

SUTTON. Well, don't do it again.

PERRY. Very sorry, sir, not our fault, sir; it's when they changes over the dynamos in the power 'ouse, sir.

SUTTON. Well, something ought to be done about it. You'd better speak to somebody—er—somewhere.

PERRY. Very good, sir.

SUTTON. All right, Perry; you can go.

PERRY. Thank you, sir.

[*Exit R. door.*]

BLAND. What were you saying, Denny?

KEEGAN. I forgot—by the way, who's got my pearl?

[*The men all look toward* GOLDING.]

Oh, there it is; pass it along, Golding.

[GOLDING *hands the case to* SOPWITH.]

SOPWITH. Thanks. Hullo! Where's the pearl?

KEEGAN. In the case, you ass.

SOPWITH. No, it isn't; the case is empty.

KEEGAN. Oh, rot! Where is it?

SOPWITH. It isn't here.

KEEGAN. Look here, you chaps, no larks! Where's that blessed pearl?

GOLDING. It was in the case when the light failed.

KEEGAN. But where is it now?

GOLDING. I don't know.

CAVANAGH. I say, pass it along, there's a good chap; it's a bit too valuable to monkey with.

GOLDING. I'm not monkeying. The pearl was here when the light went out; I was just passing it to Sopwith.

SOPWITH. That's right; I was just going to take it from him, but I missed it in the dark and jostled his arm.

KEEGAN. Then it must be on the floor. Have a look round; got a match, anybody?

[CAVANAGH *strikes a match; they search round* GOLDING'S *chair, but do not find it.* BLAND *and others look on the table, but find nothing.* GOLDING *helps to search, but finally stands up empty-handed.*]

Can't you find it?

GOLDING. No, it isn't on the floor—anyhow I can't see it.

KEEGAN. Well, I'm blowed! I'll sue that Electric Light Company if it's lost.

[*There is a pause; they all look at each other.*]

CAVANAGH. Look here, you fellers, this thing's beyond a joke. Keegan's lost a pearl worth five hundred quid; we can't sit round as if nothing had happened. If we'd seen the thing fall out the case, it would be different. I don't know how you chaps feel about it, but I'm going to turn out my pockets. You never know where things'll settle when they fall.

BLAND. That's an idea! Here goes for mine too.

[CAVANAGH *and* BLAND *start to turn out their pockets, laying keys, loose silver, etc., on table.*]

SUTTON. Come on, boys. [*Rises.*] Out with your valuables; we can't leave this table till we've all shown willing.

KEEGAN. No, no; you can't! Don't be a lot of silly asses; the beastly thing'll turn up when they sweep the room.

CAVANAGH. Well, I think we'd all rather complete the search now. It may be in my pocket for all I know.

[*All, including* KEEGAN, *turn out their pockets, standing up to do so.* GOLDING *alone sits, staring straight in front of him, making no attempt to follow suit. In the confusion he is unnoticed until* CAVANAGH *looks up.*]

Hello! What's the matter, Golding?

GOLDING. Nothing.

[*The other men stop searching and stare at him.*]

CAVANAGH. Aren't you going to turn out your pockets?

[*Pause.*]

GOLDING. I—I'm sorry—I—can't.

CAVANAGH. Can't!

GOLDING. No.

CAVANAGH. Look here, Golding—

KEEGAN. Half a minute, Cavvy; it's my pigeon. You chaps are very good, but I don't like this search business, it's—well, it's sort of implying things, and I hadn't any idea of anyone's pouching my pearl—except as a joke.

CAVANAGH. If it's a joke, it's gone far enough.

GOLDING. [*To* KEEGAN] I haven't got your pearl.

CAVANAGH. Qui s'excuse—you know the rest.

BLAND. Nobody said you had it, but why not turn out your pockets?

GOLDING. I—I'd rather not.

KEEGAN. Well, I don't know what to think.

SUTTON. I think it's a matter for the Founders only. Suppose you other chaps go and start a game of pool; we'll join you later.

[*The* Extra Gentlemen and SOPWITH *exit R.* CAVANAGH, BLAND, *and* KEEGAN *get together in a knot L.* SUTTON *goes to door R.,* GOLDING *still sitting C.*]

[*At door*] Perry!

[*Pause;* PERRY *enters.*]

PERRY. Sir?

SUTTON. Don't let anybody in here for a few minutes, please.

PERRY. Yes, sir.

[*Exit.*]

KEEGAN. [*Crosses to* GOLDING; *lays a hand on his shoulder.*] Now, Golding, what's the trouble?

GOLDING. There—there isn't any trouble; I tell you I've not got your pearl.

CAVANAGH. Then why not do what we've all done?

SUTTON. [*R. C.*] Look here, Golding, you've been a bit of a mystery to most of us for some years. You used to be one of the best, and for that reason we've never pressed any inquiry as to what you do with yourself betweenwhiles; but it's a cast-iron fact

that you've not been inside this club in the last six years except to dine here as a guest of the club on Founders' night—and now—

[*Pause.*]

GOLDING. Well?

SUTTON. Well, it isn't my property that's missing; but if I were in Keegan's place, I should feel inclined to send for a policeman and have him turn your pockets out.

GOLDING. [*To* KEEGAN] You won't do that!

KEEGAN. I'd hate to do it; but, 'pon my soul, I don't see what to do. The pearl's gone, you had it last, and now—

GOLDING. And now—you think I've stolen your damned pearl, and if ever man was tempted to steal anything, I was tempted when those lights went out; but I didn't steal it—and—and—the reason I wouldn't follow Cavanagh's lead and turn out my pockets was—because I was ashamed. [*He leans his elbows on the table and hides his face in his hands.*]

KEEGAN. [*Gently pats him on the shoulder.*] Perhaps we've all made a bad mistake; if so, I'm sorry. But I think you've said either too much or not enough—D'you mind telling me why you're ashamed?

[*Pause.* GOLDING *pulls himself together and sits back in his chair.*]

GOLDING. Yes. I'll tell you everything now. I'm not ashamed any longer—I've been just a fool—I'm sorry. [*He rises and from the pockets of his dinner jacket he takes two paper bags, which he puts on the table; he motions to* KEEGAN *to examine them.*]

KEEGAN. [*Bag in hand. Pause.*] Heavens! What does this mean? [*He hands bag to* CAVANAGH, *who looks into it. The other men crowd round to see.* CAVANAGH *empties bag onto a plate. It contains only broken scraps of food.*]

SUTTON. Scraps of meat! Bits of bread—what does this mean, Golding?

GOLDING. The crumbs that fall from the rich man's table—you fellows wouldn't understand—I'm—I'm broke.

CAVANAGH. Broke?

GOLDING. Yes—broke—broke—and I'm married—I've two

kiddies at home—that stuff was for them. They won't get it now, I suppose—and—and— [*He breaks down completely, his head resting in the crook of his elbow on the table.*]

KEEGAN. [*Lays hand on* GOLDING'S *shoulder.*] Buck up, old chap. Try and tell us all about it.

[*The other men sit.*]

GOLDING. [*Looking up*] You chaps don't understand, and I can't expect you to. You see, up to seven years ago I was pretty comfortably off—

SUTTON. You used to throw it about a bit, I remember—Why, you gave twice as much to the funds as any of us when the club was started—as well as taking out a life membership.

GOLDING. I could afford it then, or thought I could; but seven years ago I married. My wife's as good as gold, right through; she wasn't—what you'd call a lady, but she's been a pal to me, and God knows I meant to give her a good time; but the year after we were married everything began to go wrong with me. First it was the failure of that big coal-mining concern in Wales, you remember?

KEEGAN. Pontyprill Coal Owners? I remember, paid a bob in the pound, didn't they?

GOLDING. No, they paid their debts in full. We were an unlimited company, and the shareholders had to stand the racket—those that could; that ate up more than half my capital for a start.

SUTTON. Rotten luck. I remember a lot of people were badly hit.

GOLDING. The next thing that hit me was a railway. I had a lot of shares in the Great Southern of England; they were reckoned safe as the Bank, and one day the directors planned an extension to London that wasn't wanted, and by some method of high finance they converted all the stock I held into something that was so much waste paper. They told us at the General Meeting that the stock would be worth a huge premium in a few years' time, but all that happened was that it never paid a dividend and I had to sell for what it would fetch.

KEEGAN. I'll remember that the next time I float a company.

GOLDING. Well, it cleaned me down to a balance of something

under four hundred, and I started to speculate. I got tips from men I knew in the city, they told me when to buy, but so surely as I bought they forgot to tell me when to sell. Within two years of the first smash I lost every shilling I had in the world.

KEEGAN. That's bad.

GOLDING. Bad! Keegan, you don't know how bad! You said just now you'd been broke and hungry down in Callao—that's bad too, but you were a single man and you were holding on for an opportunity—I was broke with nothing to hold on to, and I'd a wife and kiddies. I'd never learned a trade; they never teach men of our class anything that's any good to earn money with—bad! I tell you, Keegan, I've been near sometimes to ending the whole thing for the lot of us—I've heard my kiddies crying because they were hungry; d'you realize what that means?

KEEGAN. Poor old Nat! What did you do for a living?

GOLDING. I did anything I could get to do. I'd saved about a hundred out of the wreck and we lived on that for a time. I'd have left the country and gone to Australia or Canada, that you were sneering at just now, but my wife wasn't strong enough; so I hunted round and tried for jobs—jobs! They were hell! Clerkships—fifteen shillings a week and I couldn't keep 'em at that, my writing wasn't good enough, or I forgot things the youngest office boy's supposed to remember. We'd shifted to a sort of cheap workman's flat in Brixton, then that got too expensive and we had to sell the little furniture we'd kept and take cheap rooms—then one room. I got to doing odd jobs—once I got taken on as an extra postman at Christmas time. Some letters were lost from my bag—I swear they were never in the bag—the sorters stole them or lost them, and I got the sack. They told me I was lucky that I wasn't jailed—then more off jobs—anything, and at last I struck the job that kept us till last week. Advertisement tout for the *Daily Reflector*.

SUTTON. The *Reflector*—but that's gone under.

GOLDING. Yes, it went into liquidation ten days ago. I didn't get my last week's salary and commission.

KEEGAN. You poor devil! You've had a time of it.

GOLDING. I have, and I've had enough of it. I'm through.

KEEGAN. Why didn't you come to one of us?

GOLDING. I couldn't, I've got some sort of wretched pride still. It was a horrible struggle, but I just pulled through somehow, and I always hoped—hope springs eternal with the postman's knock for men like me.

CAVANAGH. And so that's why you never came near the club except on free—on Founders' dinner nights?

GOLDING. Yes, I couldn't afford clubs, or the clothes to wear in them; but I was proud of this old pot-house that I'd helped to start and I was a life member, so year in, year out I got my old clothes out of pawn till—till they weren't fit to wear any longer—then I managed to scrape up enough to hire something to wear. You chaps wouldn't understand about that—you've never had to do it. This damned dinner jacket I've got on now is—hired—hired and not even paid for, because I hadn't the money; but the man trusted me for once because I was an old customer—d'you understand the shame of that, Keegan?

KEEGAN. Terrible!—but I don't understand—you haven't done this paper-bag trick every year, have you?

GOLDING. [*Smiles.*] Not quite so bad as that; the idea only struck me half an hour before I came out—my two youngsters hadn't had a decent feed for three days, and I thought—I thought it wouldn't be missed—and now—and now—

SUTTON. [*Suddenly and excitedly pointing to an ash-tray by* GOLDING'S *elbow*] Look! The ash-tray! There's that damned pearl, after all.

[*They all look at the ash-tray.* GOLDING *picks the pearl out and hands it to* KEEGAN.]

GOLDING. It must have fallen there when that chap jogged my elbow—funny thing we none of us thought of looking in that.

KEEGAN. [*Gazing at the pearl as it lies in his hand*] One never does see the thing that's under one's eyes—perhaps if one did, the world would be a nicer place to live in.

[*Pause.*]

Golding, in the name of everybody present, and of every member of the club, and especially on my own account, I owe you an apology. If you want me to post a written one on the notice-board, I'll do it at once.

GOLDING. Oh, no, please! But I wish it hadn't happened, because I suppose, in a way, I am a kind of thief—even a poor devil like me isn't supposed to take bits of his dinner home to his kiddies—my kiddies!

KEEGAN. [*Very choky and speaking very fast to cover his feelings*] D'you know, I'm damned glad it has happened; nobody outside us here is ever going to hear about these—[*He indicates the bag of scraps.*] and d'you know, Golding, you and I are going out right here and now to buy your kiddies the best feed we can get 'em. If we can't find a shop open, we'll get a basket from the Carlton—what's more I'm coming home to Brixton, or wherever it is you live, to see the little beggars make beasts of themselves. [*He blows his nose violently.*]

GOLDING. You're a good chap. I don't know how to thank you.

KEEGAN. Shut up! I haven't finished—there's just one other thing, old chap; I've got a job that'll just suit you. It's way out of England on one of my Pacific plantations—the loveliest island you've ever seen. I want a manager there who's a white man, and he'll be better married than single, so it all fits on you see, and you'll have to hustle round all of you and get your outfits quick-time, for you sail next week. Yes, and the climate's good enough for white kiddies. No, shut up, don't thank me; the debt's on my side.

SUTTON. There's one more toast I'm going to give you tonight.

KEEGAN. Out with it then.

SUTTON. To the health and prosperity of the new Plantation Manager, his wife, and the kiddies. God bless 'em!

KEEGAN. We'll drink that standing.

[*They all look at* GOLDING, *raising their glasses.*]

CURTAIN

'LIJAH[1]

BY

EDGAR VALENTINE SMITH

Edgar Valentine Smith belongs to Alabama. His birthday, February 14, explains his middle name. After some experiences in business and successes as a writer of fiction,—in 1923 his *Prelude* was the prize-winning O. Henry story in *Harper's Magazine*,—he became definitely associated with the *Birmingham* (Alabama) *News*. In his writing Mr. Smith sees deeply into Southern character and feeling.

'Lijah is a fine type of comedy—a page turned back in the book of the romantic South. The play, based on the author's story of the same name, which appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, was awarded first prize by the Birmingham Little Theatre in 1925, being selected from fifty plays submitted from throughout Alabama. While it is an effective and veracious picture of fastidious aristocracy, traditional of the South, it is more than local; it emphasizes a universal living quality, of which Southern hospitality is a characteristic expression.

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CHARACTERS

JUDGE HOLMSTED (*pronounced* Homested), *a Southern planter*
FIRST STRANGER, *a Northern business man*
SECOND STRANGER, *the same*
'BAMA, *a negro woman servant*
and
"'LIJAH"

'LIJAH

SCENE: *The living-room of Holmacres (pronounced* Home-acres), *a Southern colonial home. The wall paper is badly in need of repair. Upholstery of the furniture, which is of rosewood, is badly worn. There is everywhere the evidence of shabby gentility. A rosewood secretary stands in one corner of the room. There is an old sofa; also two or three chairs and a table in the center of the room, on which is an oil lamp and several ponderous law books. There are ancestral portraits in tarnished gilt frames on the walls. At R. C. is an arched doorway, giving into the hallway, where the bottom of a flight of stairs is seen. At L. C. is a broad window looking out upon the fields. At L. there is a large stone fireplace with a mantel, beneath which is an inscription. Between this and the broad window, L. C., there is another door. On the mantel are two vases (twins), and between these an old-fashioned clock. There is also a glass jar on the mantel. The only modern thing in the room is a telephone on the wall, R.*

[*The two* STRANGERS *enter from the door, L.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*Speaking from door, L.*] Just make yo'-selves comfortable, gentlemen. I'll join you in a moment, if you'll pardon me.

[*The* SECOND STRANGER *is not so tall as his companion: more voluble; age about forty; typical "bustling" business man. He is dressed in outing suit, with knee-height laced boots.*]

SECOND STRANGER. All right, Judge.

[FIRST STRANGER *is tall; age fifty; hair graying at temples. He is reserved in manner and speech; dressed as is his companion.*]

FIRST STRANGER. Fine old gentleman!

SECOND STRANGER. Yes. Regular story-book type. Thought they were all dead now. Makes our job a little harder.

FIRST STRANGER. How?

SECOND STRANGER. Well . . . it makes me feel kind of funny, accepting a man's hospitality when we're here for the express purpose of getting some of his property as cheaply as we can. How in the world are we going to talk business to a man who treats us like members of his family?

FIRST STRANGER. Simply talk . . . business. This is an acquisitive—a commercial age. If he isn't acquisitively inclined . . . [*Shrugs his shoulders.*]

SECOND STRANGER. Sure! That's what we've come five hundred miles for. By the way, just as a feeler, I tried him out last night after you had gone upstairs. Asked him about his holdings, plantation lands, and so on. Incidentally, he mentioned that he owns what he calls the "hill forty," several miles from here. Took it in payment of a fee from a client. From the way he spoke of it, he doesn't even suspect its value.

FIRST STRANGER. Well . . . that simplifies matters—some.

SECOND STRANGER. Absolutely! If he has something of value and doesn't know it why—that's his misfortune.

FIRST STRANGER. [*Places finger on his lips.*] Sh-h-h!

[JUDGE HOLMSTED *enters through door, L.; age, about seventy; tall, slender, the personification of courtliness, with flowing white hair, moustache, and goatee. His shoes, though well-polished, are worn. He is dressed carefully, after a "shabby genteel" fashion; wears a long Prince Albert coat, shiny from much usage, as are his trousers; has on low collar and black string bow tie and double-breasted vest.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. I'm sorry, gentlemen, to have kept you waitin', but there was a little dispute among some of the servants that I had to settle.

SECOND STRANGER. You find them quite a care—so many of them—don't you, Judge?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Yes, suh; they are.

FIRST STRANGER. Still, your kind of servants can be depended on, can't they?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*With sly humor*] Yes, suh. Particularly to do what they're not supposed to do.

[SECOND STRANGER *chuckles audibly, while* FIRST *smiles appreciatively.*]

SECOND STRANGER. [*Glancing toward telephone on wall, R.*] I suppose the telephone connects with the town—Wynnesborough?—doesn't it?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Yes, suh. And we get pretty good service, too. The lady in charge, Miss Effie—Miss Effie Winsdale—belongs to one of our oldest families, suh. Splendid young woman. And very accommodatin'. She can generally get the connection, too.

SECOND STRANGER. I suppose there's a garage in town that we can call and get a conveyance?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*Surprised*] A conveyance? What for, if I may ask, suh?

SECOND STRANGER. We'll be wanting to inspect the timberlands we spoke to you about. I believe you said they lie on the river three or four miles from here? We'll need to be going back and forth—

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*Interrupting*] Then use one of the hawsses on the place, suh. I'll just have one of them hitched to a buggy. Our country roads aren't suited to automobiles and for that reason I've never bought one. Will you be wantin' to leave right away?

FIRST STRANGER. [*Looking at watch*] We ought to be getting an early start, but as to accepting the use of a team from you, Judge, that would be unthinkable. We can't transgress on your hospitality—

SECOND STRANGER. [*Interrupting laughingly*] No, no, Judge! We can't impose on you like that. Really, I feel that it's an imposition, accepting your invitation to stay here. Our inspection of the lands will require several days, perhaps a week—

JUDGE HOLMSTED. No imposition at all, suh! The idea of yo' rentin' a conveyance with all the hawsses we have on the place eatin' their lazy heads off! As to yo' stay here, [*He smiles whimsically.*] just think of me, gentlemen! I'm an old man— all alone, except for—except for the servants—and dreadfully lonely at times. I appreciate company. You'll be doin' me a real service by makin' Holmacres yo' home while you're in this vicinity. You *must* do it. I insist.

SECOND STRANGER. That's very kind of you, Judge. And if you insist—

JUDGE HOLMSTED. But I'm forgettin'. You said you wanted to be off. I'll have the rig hitched up for you. Just wait here till I call [*Hesitates, plainly embarrassed.*] till I call . . . er . . . 'Lijah. [*Goes to doorway, R. C., and calls.*] 'Lijah! [*There is no answer. Calls again, more loudly.*] 'Lijah!! . . . Oh, *'Lijah!!!*

['BAMA *has entered the room through doorway, L. Typical plantation servant, born and reared on the place and assumes certain prerogatives. She is about sixty, fat and black. She holds something in her hand; stops just inside room, gazing fixedly at* JUDGE HOLMSTED. *Evidently puzzled.*]

'BAMA. [*In a wondering aside*] *'Lijah?*

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*Turns from doorway, patently annoyed.*] He's not in the house, evidently. [*Lightly, to* FIRST STRANGER] You see how they are, suh: generally to be depended on to be somewhere else when you want them.

['BAMA *has been standing near doorway, L., understanding slowly dawning in her face.*]

'BAMA. Judge, suh, you drapped yo' spec's on de dinin'-room flo'. [*Hands him spectacle case.*] Speakin' 'bout 'Lijah, suh, don't you know whare he's at? Down behin' de bahn, diggin' yearthworms to *go fishin' wid!*

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*To the* STRANGERS] I might have remembered, gentlemen. You'll learn somethin' about our Southern niggers if you stay down here awhile. For one thing, it's almost

impossible to keep a nigger and a river apart when the catfish are bitin'. Excuse me, please, while I step out to the barn. Maybe 'Lijah is still there.

[*Leaves through doorway, R. C.*]

SECOND STRANGER. [*To* 'BAMA] And who is 'Lijah?

'BAMA. [*With superb scorn*] Cap'n, suh, jus' think o' de mos' wu'thless nigger you is ever heared of . . . an' 'at's 'Lijah.

SECOND STRANGER. What does he do?

'BAMA. Fishes—day an' night!

SECOND STRANGER. *Day and night?* When does he sleep?

'BAMA. [*Derisively*] *Him sleep? 'Lijah* sleep. Don't you worry none 'bout 'Lijah not gittin' no sleep, Cap'n. All he needs is a sof' spot on de shady side of a tree when dey's somep'm needs to be done 'bout de house. He'll 'tend to de sleepin'.

[*The* STRANGERS *laugh heartily.* 'BAMA *leaves stage through door, L.*]

SECOND STRANGER. She's a character, too, it seems. [*Musingly*] These Southern planters must lead an ideal existence. [*Takes cigar from pocket, feels for match, fails to find one, and walks to mantelshelf. Leans over to strike match, which he finds there, and has his attention drawn to inscription.*] Hello! Have you seen this inscription—or motto?

FIRST STRANGER. [*Has seated himself at table, casually scanning one of the law books. Glances about.*] What does it say?

SECOND STRANGER. [*Leans closer to fireplace.*] "Be not forgetful . . . to entertain strangers . . . for thereby some . . . have entertained angels . . . unawares."

FIRST STRANGER. Angels!

SECOND STRANGER. [*Laughs.*] Angels! [*Faces about, musing.*] I guess that's the mainspring of his hospitality. Kind of bred in the bone. Part of his inheritance, too. Probably placed there by his first ancestor who built this place. Well . . . I'll say that he's living up to the motto. But . . . we can't afford to be getting sentimental. Business is business. That's a bromide—but it's the truth, too.

[JUDGE HOLMSTED *enters through doorway, R. C.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Caught him just as he was gettin' ready to leave, gentlemen. You'll find the hawss and buggy hitched at the front gate when you're ready. [*He turns toward secretary.*]

['BAMA *enters from door, L., with dusting-cloth on her arm.*]

'BAMA. [*Suggestively*] Judge, suh, if you is lookin' foh seegars, you won't hahdly find none in 'at seceta'y. I seed 'Lijah sof'-footin' it 'roun' in here yistiddy evenin' when I was sweepin' de hall. An' if de seegars is gone, *he's got 'em!*

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*Embarrassed*] 'Lijah? Oh . . . of course, 'Bama! [*To his guests*] The triflin' black rascal!

[STRANGERS *smile tolerantly.*]

SECOND STRANGER. [*Laughing*] So he even pilfers your cigars, does he, Judge? [*Takes out cigar case and extends it to* JUDGE HOLMSTED.] Try one of these.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Thank you, suh. [*Places cigar in vest pocket.*] I'll smoke it presently.

SECOND STRANGER. Guess we'd better be moving.

[*The* STRANGERS, *followed by* JUDGE HOLMSTED, *go to doorway, R. C. The* STRANGERS *disappear through it.* JUDGE HOLMSTED *stops in doorway.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. He's perfectly gentle, gentlemen. His name is Grover Cleveland. You see [*Laughing*] I'm a Democrat. Hope you have a pleasant day. Come in any time you wish. Holmacres is always open. Good-mawnin' . . . g-o-o-d-mawnin'. [*He is thoughtful. Goes to mantel, takes top from glass jar, extracts long, thin, cheap black cheroot. Bites off end; starts to light it. Hesitates. Takes cigar from vest pocket. Compares the two. Replaces cheroot carefully in jar. Lights cigar. Seats himself. Blowing out cloud of smoke.*] Ah-h-h!!

['BAMA *stops in her work of dusting the furniture to gaze fixedly at the* JUDGE.]

'BAMA. [*Awe-stricken*] Judge, suh, you mean to say you is gwine to let dem two mens drive *Grovuh Cleveland to a buggy?*

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Yes, 'Bama.

'BAMA. But how is you gwine to git back an' fo'th to yo' law office?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*Slowly*] I guess I'll have to take the mule from Eph.

'BAMA. My Lawd, Judge! Take de onlies' work muel dey is on de place, an' de Bermoody an' Johnson grass jus' chokin' de cotton to death? Can't dem gentlemens git deyse'ves a hawss an' buggy?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*Tartly*] You forget, 'Bama. Those gentlemen are guests at Holmacres.

'BAMA. Yes, suh. [*Subsides for a moment.*] But . . . ain't dey *Yankees,* suh?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*With considerable asperity*] They are gentlemen, 'Bama . . . and my guests.

[*He sighs deeply as the curtain falls long enough to denote passage of the day.*]

[*The curtain rises on the same scene. After dinner that evening. A jumble of voices is heard off stage toward door, L. The* STRANGERS *enter, followed by* JUDGE HOLMSTED. *The boots of the* STRANGERS *are caked with mud.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*Continuing narrative*] It seems, gentlemen, that this was the nigger's favorite coon dog. As he told the story, the dog and the coon fought and fought until finally they got right in the middle of the railroad track. Then a train came along and put an end to fighting for both of them. And the nigger wound up the story with the most woebegone expression on his face by saying: "De on'y thing I hates 'bout it, Jedge, is 'at dawg always will *b'lieve* he wuz *kilt by a coon!*"

[*The* STRANGERS *laugh heartily.*]

FIRST STRANGER. That's a good one. I'll have to remember it.

SECOND STRANGER. They're great characters, Judge—your

Southern negroes. Wonderfully interesting, from what I've heard of them.

FIRST STRANGER. Very interesting. [*Glances down at boots.*] By the way, Judge, since we didn't have time before supper, I know you'll excuse us while we step up to the room and clean up a bit.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Certainly, suh!

[*The* STRANGERS *leave through doorway, R. C., and are seen mounting the stairs.*]

['BAMA *enters through doorway, L.*]

[JUDGE HOLMSTED *calling after* STRANGERS] Just leave your boots outside the door, gentlemen. I'll have 'Lijah clean them.

'BAMA. Judge, suh, did you git 'at lettuh what was on de seceta'y?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. A letter? No, 'Bama. [*He goes to secretary; seats himself; takes up letter; looks at it.*] Why . . . it's—from the bank.

['BAMA *leaves room through door, L.*]

I wonder . . . [*He opens letter nervously; reads it; is greatly perturbed; looks at it again; goes to telephone; takes down receiver.*] Hello! Miss Effie? Will you please, ma'am, get Mr. Needham for me? No'm; he'd hardly be at the bank this late. Try his home. . . . Is that you, Mr. Needham? This is Judge Holmsted, suh. I . . . just got the bank's letter, Mr. Needham. I don't quite understand it. . . . Why—you don't mean that the bank won't renew the mortgage? . . . They've sold it? . . . It's in the hands of someone else, you say? . . . And this other person insists on settlement? But . . . but, Mr. Needham, I had counted on the bank's renewin' it as usual, suh. And it's due the fifteenth of next month? . . . I suppose so, suh . . . I suppose so . . . if the paper's passed into other hands. Yes, suh. I understand, Mr. Needham . . . I understand. Thank you for yo' trouble and I'm sorry I had to disturb you this time of night. Good-night, suh.

[*With a hand that trembles, he replaces the receiver on its hook, and turns away from the 'phone. His shoulders droop; he is suddenly a broken old man. Slowly he walks to his chair and drops heavily into it. He stares moodily into the fireplace.*]

['BAMA *enters room through door, L.*]

'BAMA. Judge, suh, dey's somep'm I oughta tell you. [*She is plainly very much worried.*] Hit's bad news, suh.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. All news seems to be bad news, 'Bama, since that ring of crooked politicians took the judgeship away from me. What is it now?

'BAMA. You remembuh, suh, I tol' you yistiddy 'bout de cow comin' home wid her laig all swole up like she was snake-bit? Well, suh . . . she died dis evenin'. An' bofe dem gentlemens likes cream in dey breakfas' cawfee, suh.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. [*Dully*] I don't know that there's anything we can do about it, 'Bama.

'BAMA. Naw, suh. Jus' thought I oughta let you know, suh.

['BAMA *leaves through door, L.* JUDGE HOLMSTED *resumes his attitude of hopeless musing. Voices are heard off stage. The* STRANGERS *are seen descending the stairs.* JUDGE HOLMSTED *rises quickly to his feet. He straightens his tie; runs his hand through his tousled hair; tugs at the lapels of his coat; throws up his head and squares his shoulders.*]

[*The* STRANGERS *enter through doorway, R. C.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Come right in, gentlemen! Come right in! Seat yo'selves. [*All three take seats.*] I have to keep track of 'Lijah—or try to—and I forgot to ask you gentlemen if he brought hot water for your shaving this mornin'.

SECOND STRANGER. [*Laughing*] No, Judge; but that's all right.

FIRST STRANGER. Perfectly all right, Judge.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. I'm sorry, gentlemen. [*He makes little hopeless gesture.*] That trifling black rascal will be the death of me yet. If I don't wring his neck, first.

FIRST STRANGER. You Southerners treat your servants differently, Judge, from the way we do in the North. There they know that certain things are required of them. And they do those things —or get out.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. But they're not niggers, suh. There's the difference. Take 'Lijah, for instance. Been on the place all his life, goin' on sixty years. So was his father. I couldn't get rid of 'Lijah if I wanted to and I'll admit I don't *want to*. If I did, and were to discharge him, he'd simply refuse to stay discharged. He'd come sneakin' back—provided he were ever really to leave the place—and the first thing I knew 'Bama would be feedin' him again. So . . . there you are!

['BAMA, *entering through doorway, L., has a plainly worried expression on her face.*]

'BAMA. Judge, you is jus' nachelly got *to do somep'm 'bout 'Lijah!*

JUDGE HOLMSTED. What's the rascal been up to now, 'Bama?

'BAMA. Nothin', suh! [*Indignantly*] Excep' he's been 'mongst de chickens ag'in. Took de las' ones I had, too, 'at I been fattenin'.

[FIRST STRANGER *smiles;* SECOND STRANGER *chuckles, shaking his head.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Oh, well, 'Bama, I reckon we'll have to forgive him this time. He's probably givin' a party.

SECOND STRANGER. [*To* 'BAMA] Doesn't he catch enough fish for his parties?

'BAMA. Yes, suh; he ketches plenty fish. But . . . but you see, suh, catfish is jus' a nigguh's regluh eatin' victuals. Dey uses de chicken kinduh foh—kinduh foh—dessert.

FIRST STRANGER. Does he give many of these parties?

'BAMA. [*Sniffing*] 'Tain't no pahty he's givin', suh. It's a shindig—jus' a plain shindig!

[*The* STRANGERS *do not understand. They look at each other, then at the* JUDGE, *inquiringly.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. A shindig, gentlemen, is a dance.

SECOND STRANGER. [*To* 'BAMA] What? An old man like 'Lijah, dance?

'BAMA. [*Derisively*] Him *dance?* 'Lijah dance? Cap'n, suh, jus' you say "fiddle" to 'at nigguh, an' he stahts to shufflin' his feets acrost de flo' right now! Age ain't purified him none.

[*The* STRANGERS *laugh.*]

An' him wid gran'chillun! [*Starts toward door, L.*] I'se gwine to have him churched. I sho' Gawd is! [*Goes through doorway, L.*] Out dere diggin' yearthworms foh fish bait an' lettin' all 'em cows an' ca'fs git together! Co'se, he don't keer if us ain't got no cream foh de breakfas' cawfee. De no 'count *bagavond!*

JUDGE HOLMSTED. You'll have to excuse 'Bama, gentlemen. 'Lijah aggravates her considerably.

[FIRST STRANGER *rises, walks to window, L. C., that looks out upon the fields. The full moon is shining. He stands musing at the window.*]

SECOND STRANGER. This 'Lijah of yours, Judge, must be a prize! I've read often about the Southern plantation servants, but thought that 'Lijah's type existed only in fiction. I simply *must* see him before I leave. I know, though, just what he's like: a cigar-pilfering old negro who occasionally slips your bird dogs out and runs rabbits with them. Guess he takes your foxhounds out, too, sometimes at nights and hunts 'coons and 'possums with them. I can see him grumbling a great deal and complaining of a "misery" in his back when he's told to do something he doesn't want to do.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. You've described him very accurately, suh. But . . . his type is disappearin'—disappearin' rapidly. And the younger generation—— Well . . . we won't mention them. We're attached—we Southerners are—and we might as well admit it, to the old slavery-time nigger. There's somethin' about him . . . Well—bein' from the North, you could hardly understand—but there's somethin' that draws us to him. The old things, though, are

passin'. Take the old families that used to live hereabouts. Nearly all of them have gone to the cities, leavin' the plantations in the hands of tenants and the places have gone to ruin.

FIRST STRANGER. And you, Judge? [*He has turned about from the window.*] You've never felt any urge to leave the plantation yourself?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Not the least, suh. We Holmsteds have always been lovers of the land and have always lived close to it. Maybe we were a little more firmly rooted in the soil than some of the others were. . . . Ye-e-s . . . things are different. Take the river, for one thing. Once we had an average of two steamboats a day on the 'Bigbee. Now . . . there's one a week. Then we always went to Mobile by boat. Those were great days, gentlemen! *Great* days! There was always a crowd of niggers on board with their fiddles and guitars. And dances! Many a time I've danced the polka and schottish until daybreak on a boat in midstream, gentlemen, with the *fairest partners* to be found in the *world!*

[SECOND STRANGER *is leaning forward in his chair interestedly.* FIRST STRANGER *has faced about from the window again and is drinking in every word.*]

[*Continuing*] And the races between the different boats! Why, gentlemen, I've seen two of them pass our landin' here in the night, neck and neck, with their smokestacks flamin' red from top to bottom! You could see the niggers on the lower decks, stripped to the waist, the sweat pourin' from their brown bodies, as they fed the fat lightwood to the furnaces. I was a passenger on the *Nettie Belle* in seventy, when she beat the *Clay Jackson* in that famous race from Mobile to Demopolis by two hours, with a ten-foot rise in the 'Bigbee. And more than once, gentlemen—more than once!—I've seen a boat pull to the bank for two hot-headed young bloods to go ashore and settle their differences accordin' to the code!

FIRST STRANGER. With pistols, Judge?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Yes, suh! In those days, gentlemen fought like gentlemen. And once . . . I saw a boat burned to the water's

edge . . . not a half mile from our landin'. Ye-e-e-s . . . things were different, then. Goin' down in the fall, we'd stop at every landin' to load cotton, the boats racin' each other to see which could take in the biggest cargo. And I've seen fights—blood fights, gentlemen!—between cap'ns of different boats over the right to load cotton at landin's. [*He checks himself, suddenly embarrassed.*] But . . . pshaw! I'm becomin' garrulous. An old man, grievin' of the departed glories of his youth!

SECOND STRANGER. Not at all, Judge! Not at all! Go on!

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Some other time, gentlemen—if you please. Some other time. I'm monopolizin' the conversation.

FIRST STRANGER. It's positively enchanting here! [*Sniffs the air.*] What's that scent? Magnolia?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. No, suh; that's our cape jessamine. It's very fragrant this time of the year.

FIRST STRANGER. I don't think I ever saw such moonlight! The live oaks look like they are bathed in a perfect mantle of silver dust. [*He turns regretfully from window.*] I've just been thinking of the possibilities here for a stock farm, Judge. I understand that your native grasses—Bermuda and Johnson, I believe you call them?—make excellent pasturage and hay. They're volunteer crops, too, aren't they?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. So much so, suh, that we have to fight to keep them from takin' the cotton.

FIRST STRANGER. Probably, though, the idea of a stock farm doesn't appeal to you Southerners. You're so wedded to cotton.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Wedded? [*Smiles whimsically.*] The word is well chosen, suh. And since the boll weevil hit us it looks like a weddin' with no chance of divo'ce.

[*The* STRANGERS *laugh.*]

SECOND STRANGER. That's just what I would do if I owned this place, Judge. I understand that your land runs clear down to the river? Well, there's the water for your cattle. I'd stock this place with Angus or Hereford cattle and Berkshire hogs. Then divide it into pastures with a suitable number of fences. Your Bermuda

and Johnson grasses would furnish spring and summer grazing. Then there are your river canebrakes for winter forage. Why, just think of it, man! Those rolling acres dotted with sleek, black cattle and fat hogs! And your bottom lands would raise what corn you needed. Romance? There it is for you! Why, a man under those conditions wouldn't have anything to do but sit and count his money as it came in!

JUDGE HOLMSTED. I've quite often thought of venturing some along that line, suh. [*Very casually*] I may even try it next year.

['BAMA *enters through doorway, L., with something in her hand.*]

'BAMA. Judge, you dropped yo' fountain pen, too, suh.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Thank you, 'Bama.

['BAMA *leaves room through door, L.*]

But I'm forgettin', gentlemen! You're probably tired from your day's tramp through the swamp. Any time you feel like retiring, don't stand on ceremony. Guests at Holmacres, you know, are home folks.

SECOND STRANGER. I'll confess I am a little tired, Judge. [*Rises.*] And if you'll excuse us—

FIRST STRANGER. Yes, Judge, that swamp mud was a bit thick.

[*The* STRANGERS *walk toward doorway, R. C.* JUDGE HOLMSTED *follows them to door.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Good-night, gentlemen! Just leave your boots outside the door and I'll have 'Lijah polish them.

THE STRANGERS. Good-night, Judge. [*As they mount the stairs*] Thank you. Good-night!

[JUDGE HOLMSTED *walks slowly to window, L. C., folds his arms, and gazes out, musing.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Blooded cattle . . . pastures . . . fat hogs. . . . [*Turns abruptly from window.*] Pshaw! I'm dreaming!

['BAMA *enters from doorway, L.*]

'BAMA. Judge, de reason you is always drappin' things outen yo' coat is dey mus' be a hole in de pocket. Better pull it off an' lemme fix it.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. All right, 'Bama. [*Removes coat and hands it to her.*] But let me have it early in the morning—early—remember.

'BAMA. Yes, suh. [*Takes coat.*] An' you better leave off 'at shirt an' git another one in de mawnin'. De cuffs is all frazzled an' I wants to turn 'em.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. All right, 'Bama. [*Glances mechanically at cuffs.*] I'll go now. I feel like retiring too. I won't need you again tonight.

'BAMA. Yes, suh. Good-night, suh.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Good-night, 'Bama.

[*He leaves through doorway, R. C. Mounts stairs.* 'BAMA *shuffles about room, putting out lights, lowering shades, etc., singing softly to herself,* "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." *Leaves through doorway, L.* JUDGE HOLMSTED *reënters room carrying two pairs of mud-stained boots and a lantern. Seats himself and begins cleaning boots as*

CURTAIN FALLS

[*And remains down long enough to denote the passage of five days. The curtain rises on scene same as before. The* SECOND STRANGER *is standing beside the window that looks out upon the field, gazing thoughtfully out. The* FIRST STRANGER, *seated beside the center table, picks up a newspaper. There are a couple of suit-cases in the room. The two men are dressed for traveling. It is morning and they have finished breakfast. They are alone in the room.*]

FIRST STRANGER. [*Reading*] "The *Wynnesborough Clarion.* Published weekly at Wynnesborough, Wynne County." [*Stops and looks at his companion.*] Well?

SECOND STRANGER. [*Whirls about from window.*] Don't ask me. I've been trying for three days to figure out a way to approach him. I don't know how to do it.

FIRST STRANGER. We'll have to be diplomatic.

SECOND STRANGER. Yes. And it'll take more money—a lot more—than we intended offering for the property.

FIRST STRANGER. I don't doubt it. And he's not the kind of man you can haggle with over price, either.

SECOND STRANGER. Decidedly not! If we offend him—once—we might as well call the whole thing off. He'd very courteously, but very firmly, refuse to listen to any offer that we might make.

FIRST STRANGER. Ye-e-s. . . . And we know it's a valuable property—

SECOND STRANGER. Valuable? Man, it's a mint—a bonanza! It's the richest deposit I ever saw in a similar area. And I've got a hunch that we're going to have to pay for it, too . . . if we get it.

FIRST STRANGER. If we get it? Think there's any doubt of it? Do you imagine the Judge has any idea as to its value?

SECOND STRANGER. Well . . . ye-e-s. I'm practically sure of it. [*Takes cigar from pocket and lights it. Does not look directly at companion.*] I—I saw . . . 'Lijah—at last—yesterday afternoon. I gathered from him that the Judge has known of the deposit for a long time. 'Lijah even went so far as to say—

FIRST STRANGER. So-o . . . you've *really seen 'Lijah?* What does he look like?

SECOND STRANGER. Just what I expected—only more so. You'll have to see him to appreciate him. [*Laughs exaggeratedly.*] He's quite a character. Just getting ready to go fishing when I ran into him. Got to talking with him and brought up the subject of the "hill forty," as the Judge calls it. 'Lijah said that he doubted if the Judge would sell at all unless he got a mighty good price for it. Ha! Ha! That's just the way he expressed it: a "mighty good price." Said the Judge is holding it as a sort of nest egg. Doesn't need to sell, you know. Why should he? Got this plantation, with a healthy income from it. Servants running all over the place. And he has no direct descendants. Last of his race and that sort of thing. Then, there's his law practice. I understand that he makes quite a bit out of that, too. Keeps him busy and happy. Now . . . I'd suggest . . .

First Stranger. Just a moment! [*Walks around in front of the other and compels his attention.*] Remember . . . old man . . . we're partners. Let's be frank. Just how long . . . have you known . . . the actual conditions here?

Second Stranger. Why . . . why . . . what do you mean?

First Stranger. How long have you known that there's no such person as 'Lijah? That he was created by the Judge in his extremity solely in order to have something to blame for the shortcomings in his hospitality? When did you find out that the horse we've been driving every day is the Judge's saddle horse and the only one on the place? That he took the only mule on the place to ride to his office and back? That he doesn't make enough out of his law practice to feed himself? That this place is mortgaged to the limit and that he couldn't borrow a hundred dollars if his life depended on it?

Second Stranger. I—I——

First Stranger. Listen! Two mornings ago I was awakened by the singing of a mocking bird. I got up and crept to the window without disturbing you to try to get a glimpse of it. And what do you think I saw? The Judge, under one of those China trees, *cleaning the mud from our boots! He's* your *'Lijah!*

Second Stranger. And that isn't all! You remember last night when I told you I couldn't sleep? Thought I'd walk around a bit? I saw a light in the barn and walked down that way, hoping to find 'Lijah. I saw him, too! By the light of a lantern hung on the wall, the Judge, with his coat off and his shirt sleeves rolled above his elbows, *was washing the mud off of that damned old buggy* to have it halfway decent for us to take out again and get more mud on it for him to wash off. The hospitable, poverty-stricken old aristocrat—!

[Judge Holmsted *enters the room from L.*]

Judge Holmsted. And you're really leavin' Holmacres, gentlemen? I had hoped for the pleasure of yo' company for several days longer.

SECOND STRANGER. Yes, Judge; as much as we hate to go. But . . . business . . . you know.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Oh, I understand, gentlemen.

FIRST STRANGER. We can't begin to thank you for your hospitality, Judge, so we won't even try. We can only say that we appreciate it deeply.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Don't mention it, gentlemen. I've been mo' than pleased to have you gentlemen with me.

SECOND STRANGER. It's certainly been a pleasure to us, Judge.

[*The two* STRANGERS *appear nervous. They fidget about, glancing at each other suggestively. For once, the* SECOND STRANGER *seems willing for the other to take the lead.*]

FIRST STRANGER. Er . . . before we go, though, Judge . . . there's a little matter of business that we'd like to talk over with you—if you've got time.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Certainly, gentlemen. [*Gestures toward chairs.*] Be seated.

FIRST STRANGER. When we came here, we told you that we were dealers in timberlands. We are. But . . . we also handle other properties, among them mineral lands. Do you know that there is a deposit of mica on that hill forty of yours?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Oh, I'd heard, suh, that there was isinglass, as we call it, there.

FIRST STRANGER. Would you—er—that is—do you think you would care to dispose of the property?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Why . . . if it would be any accommodation to you, gentlemen. It's several miles from the main body of the plantation.

FIRST STRANGER. My friend and I have talked the matter over. We realize that between gentlemen there should be no such thing as haggling over price, and we have decided to offer you the topmost figure that we can pay for the property. For the mineral rights, alone, we can give you fifty thousand dollars.

[JUDGE HOLMSTED *starts slightly. He regains his self-control. His hand, as he raises it to stroke his moustache, trembles slightly. But his voice is studiedly calm and indifferent, as he answers after a moment's wait.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. I imagine, gentlemen, that the transfer can be arranged on that basis.

SECOND STRANGER. Good! Here's our check for five thousand dollars as earnest money. You can prepare the deeds and send them to our Chicago office and we'll remit the balance.

[*The* STRANGERS *prepare to leave. One of them pulls out his cigar case and offers it to the* JUDGE.]

FIRST STRANGER. Have a cigar, Judge?

JUDGE HOLMSTED. Thank you, suh. [*Places cigar in his vest pocket.*] I'll smoke it later.

[*The* STRANGERS *pick up their suit-cases.*]

Let me help you, gentlemen. I'll call 'Lijah. [*Turns to doorway, L.*] 'Lijah! Oh, 'Lijah! [*Faces* STRANGERS.] As usual, gentlemen, the black rascal isn't to be found.

['BAMA *appears in doorway, R. C., with* STRANGERS' *hats.*]

'BAMA. Judge, suh, 'Lijah ain't here. He went down to de river early dis mawnin' to see 'bout his trot lines.

JUDGE HOLMSTED. All right, 'Bama. [*To the* STRANGERS] Yo' visit here, gentlemen, has been an extreme pleasure to me. You must come again.

THE TWO STRANGERS. Thank you, Judge.

[*There are the customary adieus, with handshaking.*]

JUDGE HOLMSTED. You'll find the buggy hitched, gentlemen. Just leave it at the livery stable in town. I'll send 'Lijah in for it. Good-by! . . . G-o-o-d . . . b-y! . . . [*He follows them to doorway. He returns to room; comes to center table; picks up paper; looks up, musing.*] Blooded cattle . . . pastures . . . fine hogs . . . servants. . . . [*He glances at paper; seems suddenly seized with an idea; drops paper and goes to 'phone.*] Miss Effie? Good-mawnin', ma'am! Fine, thank you, ma'am! Fine! How's your mother's cold? . . . Yes? Well, you just tell her to put a lard and

turpentine poultice on her chest. Yes'm. By the way, Miss Effie, could you get me the *Clarion* office? Yes'm. . . . Good-mawnin', Majuh. Is that you, suh? First rate, thank you, suh. No, suh. [*Chuckles.*] The cotton ain't doin' at all well. [*Chuckles again.*] Won't hardly pay for raisin' and gatherin', suh. [*Continues chuckling.*] Oh, Majuh, I'd like to get you to run a little advertisement in yo' columns for me if you please, suh. . . . WANTED: Negro male servant, aged about sixty, or thereabouts, for light work in plantation home. Must be willing to answer to name of Elijah. Yes, suh; that's right: Elijah. And, Majuh? Just mail the bill to me, suh. Thank you, suh. Good-by. [*He goes to fireplace; takes one of his old cheroots from the glass jar and starts to light it; remembers cigar given him by the* STRANGER; *takes it from pocket; compares the two; empties contents of glass jar into hand and throws them into the fireplace; lights cigar; blows out cloud of smoke; turns and faces audience full.*] The trifling black rascal!

CURTAIN

MEREDEW'S RIGHT HAND[1]

BY

A. Hamilton Gibbs

A(rthur) Hamilton Gibbs, like two of his older brothers, Cosmo Hamilton and Sir Philip Gibbs, has made literature his profession. Born in London, he was educated in France and at St. John's College, Oxford. With several early books, he was earning a place as an author before he came to America, in 1912, in the cast of his brother's, Cosmo Hamilton's, play *The Blindness of Virtue.* From 1914 to 1919 he served with the Royal Field Artillery in France, in Serbia, and in Egypt. He was decorated with the Military Cross and when demobilized held the rank of major. *Gun Fodder,* describing his army experiences, is praised as "one of the six best books about the war." Mrs. Gibbs is an American, a member of the bar, and author of the arresting novel *Portia Marries.* Since 1920 Major Gibbs has lived in New York City, and has announced his intention of becoming an American citizen. His *Soundings,* 1925, had the largest sale of the novels of that year. *Labels,* a dramatic story of post-war readjustment in England, has appeared more recently.

Meredew's Right Hand is an example of clever nonsense. Major Gibbs introduces exaggerated characters in situations amusingly unplausible. The play is intentionally farcical.

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CHARACTERS

MEREDEW, *a business man and a widower*
GUY, *his son*
MRS. MERRILL, *a cook*
JANE, *her daughter*

MEREDEW'S RIGHT HAND

SCENE: *The morning room of a London flat decorated in the modern manner usual to those whose banks would, if it came to it, allow a considerable overdraft.*

Up stage center there is a flat mahogany desk, behind which is a revolving chair. On the desk are bundles of papers, neatly arranged, letters, ink, etc. On left end of desk is a typewriter. Chair adjacent. Door R. U. E. Second door L. U. E. Fireplace R. C. Window L. C.

TIME: *9.45 A. M.*

On rise of curtain, JANE, *the housemaid, a pretty young girl of nineteen, charmingly dressed hair, neat cap and apron, is seen seated at typewriter writing a letter.*

MEREDEW, *a man of about forty-five, rather nice-looking, dressed in tail coat, is standing at desk with a letter in his hand. He is dictating the reply to* JANE.

MEREDEW. [*Folding letter*] ". . . awaiting the favor of an early reply, believe me, dear sirs, yours very truly."

JANE. [*Typing*] Shall I put this letter with the duplicate copy in the file, sir, or will you want it with you?

MEREDEW. On the whole, I think perhaps I'd better have it with me. Just copy it out, with my reply, and file both copies. [*He puts letter by her side.*] I shall be off to the office as soon as you've got them ready.

JANE. Very well, sir.

[MEREDEW *goes quickly off R. U. E.* JANE *continues typing. After a moment door U. E. opens.*]

[*Enter* GUY, *a rather flabby youth, in an inch collar, a bow tie, a smart suit, and a dilapidated pair of pumps. He is smoking a cigarette. His hands are in his pockets, and a daily paper is tucked under one arm.*]

GUY. Hullo, Jane. Jove! the Guvnor's a regular driver . . .

Never come in here without seeing you slaving away at that blessed machine.

JANE. Good-morning, sir. [*She glances at him meaningly.*] *Some*body has to work sometimes.

GUY. [*Unruffled*] Funny! [*He saunters across and stands by her chair, leaning on it.*]

[JANE *types busily.*]

Like a cigarette?

JANE. No, thank you.

GUY. Rather cold this morning, isn't it? Anything wrong?

JANE. [*Brightly*] No, thank you.

GUY. [*Leaning over*] You're a bright little thing, aren't you?

JANE. Thank you. Why don't you try it for a change?

GUY. Hum! This is evidently the off season. I don't seem to be making a hit.

JANE. Have you ever made one?

GUY. You little devil! [*He suddenly puts his hand on her shoulder and stoops to kiss her.*]

[JANE *moves quickly and slaps his face.*]

JANE. [*Quietly*] And don't try and do it again.

GUY. [*Very mortified*] Oh! look here, that's beastly unsporting. You've absolutely ruined my day. [*As he stoops and picks up papers which he has dropped in the scuffle, the door R. U. E. opens.*]

[MRS. MERRILL *enters. She is a stout woman with sleeves rolled up.*]

MRS. MERRILL. Jane, the man's come about that kitchen . . . [*She sees* GUY.] Good-morning, sir.

[GUY *takes no notice and walks out of the room.*]

MRS. MERRILL. [*Watches him safely out.*] Sweet as sugar, I'm sure! What's the matter with *him* this morning?

JANE. [*With a laugh*] A little . . . touchy. [*She finishes letter and gets up.*]

MRS. MERRILL. [*Looking at her keenly*] Has he been saying things? I've thought once or twice lately that he was making eyes.

JANE. You're quite right, mother. He thinks that eye of his is absolutely deadly. What do you think? He tried to kiss me just now. [*She laughs again.*] I caught him such a beauty.

MRS. MERRILL. Oh, indeed! Well, I'm not surprised. I thought I saw it coming. [*She begins rolling down her sleeves.*] It's high time he had a mother to look after him. . . . We'll just see what can be done. The moment has arrived.

JANE. [*Stopping folding the letters*] Done? What do you mean, mother? Guy will tell you that *I* did more than was necessary.

MRS. MERRILL. That's as may be! I'm going to do what every good mother should do—protect her child from insult.

JANE. [*Anxiously*] You mean that you're going to tell Mr. Meredew?

MRS. MERRILL. Yes, that is what I do mean. If he starts by trying to kiss you, where will it end, I should like to know? A good-for-nothing like that is not safe about the place.

JANE. [*Earnestly*] Oh! please don't say anything about it, mother. I can look after myself and . . . and Mr. Meredew is far too busy to be bothered about a little thing like that. Besides I don't think Guy will care to try it on again for some time.

MRS. MERRILL. Now you just leave it to me, my dear. It'll be all right. How do you suppose I should have got along after your poor pa's decease if I hadn't known what was what?

JANE. I wish I'd never told you.

MRS. MERRILL. [*Prophetically*] In half an hour you'll be thankful that you *did* tell me. Where is Mr. Meredew?

JANE. [*Very worried*] I don't know. I hope he's gone.

MRS. MERRILL. Well, I'll just go and see if . . . [*She goes to door.*]

[*Enter* MEREDEW *quickly R. U. E. He carries a silk hat.*]

MEREDEW. All ready for me, Jane?

JANE. [*Eagerly, gathering up papers and running to him*] Yes, sir, here they are. You needn't wait a second.

MEREDEW. Thank you, but I find I must dictate one more letter first.

MRS. MERRILL. Good-morning, sir.

MEREDEW. [*Turning*] Ah! good-morning.

MRS. MERRILL. [*Taking no notice of* JANE'S *frantic signaling*] Leave the room, Jane. I have something private to say to Mr. Meredew.

MEREDEW. Eh? Private? Please keep it till I come home to-night, Mrs. Merrill. I'm very pushed for time.

MRS. MERRILL. With all respect, sir, it won't keep. . . . Jane, you are delaying us.

MEREDEW. Oh! . . . well, all right. Come back when I ring, Jane. [*Exit* JANE.]

Now, Mrs. Merrill?

MRS. MERRILL. [*Folding her hands across her embonpoint*] I wish to claim your attention on a matter of great importance and delicateness.

MEREDEW. [*Fidgety*] Is anything wrong? I really can't spare you more than a minute or two.

MRS. MERRILL. Very wrong, sir, and you may rely on me not to detain you a moment longer than necessary. It is so wrong that my daughter and I wish to give notice to leave at the end of the month.

MEREDEW. [*Astounded*] What! Great heavens! Why? Look here you know, you can't play fast and loose like this. Jane leave at the end of the month! It's impossible, unheard of! I couldn't get on without her. She's worth her weight in gold. She's . . . why she's my right hand. Mrs. Merrill, I beg you to reconsider it.

MRS. MERRILL. [*Stifly*] It's not me that plays fast and loose. It's them that comes from universities and thinks that because a girl—an honest girl—is a housemaid, he can treat her outrageously as such.

MEREDEW. [*After an amazed pause*] What . . . do you mean?

MRS. MERRILL. [*Portentously*] Ah! You may well ask.

MEREDEW. Do you mean that my son has . . . has taken advantage of your daughter! Good heavens, if it comes to paying alimony in addition to all those solicitor's letters I shall go bankrupt.

MRS. MERRILL. [*Fiercely*] Taken advantage! How dare you

suggest that my daughter would allow any man to wheedle her—let alone such as your precious son!

MEREDEW. [*Relieved*] I beg your pardon, Mrs. Merrill, and I'm very glad, heartily glad, to be able to do so. But if it's not that, what in heaven's name is it? You make dark hints as to my son's behavior, and when I jump to the conclusions you suggest, you demand an apology. What is all this mystery?

MRS. MERRILL. I was just going to tell you, only you jumped so quick. Mr. Guy attempted to kiss my daughter this morning, and either I must know whether his intentions are honorable or else I must take her away into safety.

MEREDEW. Oh! is that all? . . . Thank Heaven. But come, come, Mrs. Merrill, boys are susceptible to feminine charms, you know, and you must remember that Jane is a very attractive young person.

MRS. MERRILL. Young person indeed! I should hope not.

MEREDEW. [*Startled*] Eh! . . . Oh! I beg your pardon. I meant young lady of course. Well I will see that he apologizes to you and to Jane and make him promise never to do it again. And then everything will be all right, eh? . . . Will you ring for her, please. I must be going.

MRS. MERRILL. No, sir. It won't be all right. Promises of that sort are made of pie-crust.

MEREDEW. [*Desperately, under his breath*] Again! [*Aloud*] Will another pound a week each do the trick?

MRS. MERRILL. [*Almost shrieking*] You ask me to sell my daughter's safety for a pound a week! . . . This house is no place for us! If the son takes what he can get for nothing, what wouldn't the master do for a pound a week? [*She hurries to door.*]

MEREDEW. No, no! Please! I apologize! Wait! Listen. [*He goes after her and grasps her by the arm.*] Now, Mrs. Merrill, I beg you to calm yourself and to believe that I meant nothing by what I said, absolutely nothing. I take it back. I wouldn't give you an extra pound for anything in the world, I . . . I meant well, that was all. [*He wipes his forehead with his handkerchief.*] We

seem to have come to a deadlock . . . er, don't we? I'm afraid I don't know what to suggest if an apology and a pound a week won't meet the case. I will do anything you like, Mrs. Merrill, anything that is right and proper. What do you advise?

MRS. MERRILL. You must have a nice opinion of me, if you think I should advise anything *im*proper!

MEREDEW. [*Hurriedly*] No, no, no!

MRS. MERRILL. Then I suggest that you have your precious son in and ask him what his intentions were in kissing my daughter.

MEREDEW. Your *precious* daughter. There's not another like her in England—or like *you*. [MRS. MERRILL *preens herself*. MEREDEW *goes to door*.] Yes, the idea is good. I'll have that young scoundrel in here . . . giving me all this trouble . . . I'll talk to him . . . [*He opens door*.] Guy! . . . *Guy!*

[MRS. MERRILL *stands nodding her head vengefully, and clenching one fist she bangs it significantly and softly into the palm of her other hand, biff!* MEREDEW *goes to fireplace, squaring his shoulders, determined to give the boy a severe talking to*.]

GUY. [*Off*] Hullo? [*After a moment, during which* MEREDEW *remains close to mantelpiece, he enters and stands at door*.] You want me?

MEREDEW. [*Through his teeth*] Yes, I do. Come in . . . shut the door. [GUY *does so*.] Now sir!

GUY. [*Innocently, looking from one to the other*] Yes?

MEREDEW. What the . . . What do you mean by it?

GUY. By what?

MEREDEW. [*Snorting with rage*] Don't "by what" me! You know precisely what I mean.

GUY. [*Simply*] Sorry, father. I really don't.

MEREDEW. [*Word by word*] What do you mean by kissing Jane?

GUY. [*Startled*] Oh!

MRS. MERRILL. [*Nodding*] Ah!

GUY. I didn't. [*He takes out cigarette and lights it*.]

MRS. MERRILL. Eh?

MEREDEW. Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself. What do you mean by not kissing Jane—or attempting to do so? Are you aware that your . . . your what shall I say . . . your carelessness has made Mrs. Merrill give me a month's notice?

GUY. Perhaps we shall get some decent cooking for a change.

[MRS. MERRILL *starts.*]

Do you mean my carelessness in not bringing it off?

MEREDEW. [*Savagely*] No, sir. I mean your moral carelessness, your university carelessness, your solicitor's letter carelessness. Can you find no better work to do than to go about trying to kiss people?

GUY. I don't know about *people*, but it's great work kissing a pretty girl.

MEREDEW. I didn't ask you to fill the room with your tobacco. Put that out. This matter is very serious.

[GUY *looks from his cigarette to his father and back again, and while* MEREDEW *continues speaking takes a last long pull, throws cigarette into fireplace, and dribbles smoke through his nose.*]

It is a question of losing Jane . . .

[MRS. MERRILL *coughs dryly behind her hand.*]

[MEREDEW *adds hastily with a little bow*] to say nothing of Mrs. Merrill, and it all comes of your extraordinary early morning tastes. You . . . you bore me, sir. You exasperate me. You cause me to be dunned by your tradesmen, you loaf about in egregious garments and now you lose me my servants. Upon my soul, I don't know what to do with you. You won't work yourself and you prevent them from working by slobbering over them.

GUY. [*Deeply pained*] That's not fair, dad. I haven't slobbered over Mrs. Merrill.

MRS. MERRILL. [*Jumping*] No, young man, you have *not*, and if ever you try it on I'll . . .

GUY. That's all right. You're quite safe. . . . Look here, father, it seems to me everybody's making a beastly fuss about

this. Dash it all, let me kiss her properly before you go on slanging me. You can't shoot a thief, you know, if his hand isn't actually on the premises.

MRS. MERRILL. [*Outraged*] Hands on the premises! How dare you talk about such a thing in my presence.

[GUY *stares at her for a moment and then bursts out laughing.*]

MEREDEW. [*Striding over to his son*] Enough fooling, do you hear me? Apologize to Mrs. Merrill at once.

GUY. I didn't mean what she meant. . . . Why should I apologize? I didn't succeed in kissing Jane. I wish I had. . . . What *is* all this? What's the idea of this judge and jury business?

MRS. MERRILL. We want to know what your intentions are.

GUY. Who do you mean by "we"? You and Jane?

MRS. MERRILL. Me and Jane and Mr. Meredew.

MEREDEW. Yes, that is what it amounts to. Were you merely philandering or was there any . . . er . . . *arrière pensée?*

GUY. [*Warmly*] Oh hot, Guv'nor! Very hot.

MRS. MERRILL. Yes, I daresay it *was* hot! I don't know what that Latin meant, but I want to know what you meant.

GUY. All right . . . I suppose I may as well tell you now as later. I want to marry Jane.

MEREDEW. Marry Jane!

MRS. MERRILL. Marry my daughter! Ah! . . . [*She looks him up and down.*] And what are your prospects, young man?

[GUY *stares at her.* MEREDEW *wheels round on her.*]

MEREDEW. Prospects! How dare you, woman! This is *my* son.

MRS. MERRILL. [*Nose to nose with him*] Yes, indeed! And Jane is *my* daughter, and what's more she's a far better daughter to me than what your son is to you.

GUY. [*Dryly*] Naturally!

MRS. MERRILL. [*Calming down*] Of course, Mr. Meredew, sir, if you say that Mr. Guy is your son, by which you intimidate that he is also your heir—then I shall be pleased to become his mother-in-law.

MEREDEW. [*Bowing sarcastically*] I am sure you do me an overwhelming honor. [*He turns to* GUY.] In addition to bringing this hornet's nest about my ears by trying to kiss Jane, have you tried to tell her in your Johnsonian English of the . . . eh . . . state of your heart?

GUY. Not yet, but I'll go and tell her now. [*He moves quickly to the door.*]

MEREDEW. Stop! . . . Ring that bell. You will tell her here.

GUY. What! in front of a crowd? That isn't cricket, dad. Hang it all, you'll put me clean off my game if you stand there gaping at us.

MRS. MERRILL. Young man, *I* do *not gape!*

MEREDEW. [*Coldly*] Will you ring that bell?

GUY. [*Deliberately putting his hands in his pockets*] No. I'm hanged if I will.

MEREDEW. You will not?

GUY. No.

MEREDEW. Then I will make an example of you, sir. [*For a moment he glares at him as if to hit him, then lamely goes to bell and puts his finger on it.*]

[*There is a heavy silence in the room.* MEREDEW *frowns.* MRS. MERRILL *stands gloating with folded hands.* GUY *begins pulling his coat into place, straightening his bow tie, smoothing his hair. Then there is a tap on the door. They all start.*]

[*Enter* JANE.]

JANE. [*Surprised*] Oh . . . Are you ready for me, sir?

MEREDEW. Er—yes, Jane. Come in and shut the door . . . or rather . . . allow me to do so. [*He hurries, but she has shut it.*] I beg your pardon . . . Er . . . my boy, Guy has told us that you . . . er . . . that you are the . . . the . . . [*He suddenly dries up and wheels round on* GUY, *who has been listening intently.*] confound it, man, don't stand there gaping! Speak up for yourself.

GUY. [*Going over to her awkwardly, with backward glances at the others*] Look here, Jane, fact is the guv'nor . . . that is I . . . you . . . oh, damn it all, father—I beg your pardon—but I don't stand an earthly with this handicap. Let me tackle the job on my own.

MRS. MERRILL. Let me explain. [*She goes over to* JANE *and speaks with emotion.*] Jane! my own little girl! [*She holds out her arms, tearfully sniffing.*] This dear boy has asked for your hand in marriage. Our consent has been given and . . . and I'm going to lose you, my baby! [*She sniffs again.*] I'm *so* happy.

JANE. [*With a gasp, looking at* GUY] Marry!

GUY. [*Eagerly*] Is it a bet?

[*There is a moment's pause. No one moves.*]

MEREDEW. Well?

[MRS. MERRILL *begins to cry.*]

JANE. Don't cry, mother. You're not going to lose me yet.

GUY. Eh? What do you mean—yet?

JANE. I mean that although it is unexpectedly nice of you, I am afraid I cannot possibly marry you.

GUY. [*His fingers falling away from his tie*] Well, I'm . . .

MRS. MERRILL. [*Shrilly, her tears ceasing instantly*] What's that!

GUY. [*Turns furiously on his father.*] I told you it was a rotten game my proposing to her with you here. You must have known it would kill my chances. Dash it, what's the good of *any*thing?

JANE. It wouldn't have made any difference if you'd proposed to me alone in a desert. I don't like you.

GUY. Thanks very much.

MRS. MERRILL. Don't be a fool, girl. He may look silly, but you'll never get such a chance again.

GUY. [*Looking like a pricked bladder*] Ha! . . . Ha!

JANE. [*Firmly*] I am sorry, mother, but it's quite impossible.

GUY. "It" meaning me, I suppose! Thank the Lord I didn't kiss you! . . . Cat!

[*He goes to door, exit, and slams door behind him.*]

MRS. MERRILL. [*Enraged*] Then we leave today—at once, this very moment. [*She hurries to door and holds it open.*]

MEREDEW. [*Going and sitting at desk*] God bless my soul.

MRS. MERRILL. Jane, come and pack your box.

[JANE *stands looking at* MEREDEW.]

Do you hear me, you obstinate hussy? What's the good of all those evening classes you've been to if they haven't taught you to know a good thing when you see it?

[JANE *goes slowly out. Her mother follows her and slams door.*]

MEREDEW. God bless my soul! [*He picks up pen, dips it in ink, plays with blotting-paper, lays down pen, gets up, looking utterly miserable, and begins walking about the room with his hands behind his back—murmurs to himself.*] She was my right hand, absolutely my right hand. [*He touches pictures and books, then goes slowly to bell and rings it.*]

[*After a moment door opens.* JANE *appears in door.*]

JANE. You rang, sir?

MEREDEW. [*Going over and bringing her in and closing door*] Yes, Jane. I wish to speak to you. [*He goes on miserably.*] Have I been a good master to you?

JANE. Yes.

MEREDEW. Have I worked you too hard, or been abrupt and irritable?

[JANE *shakes her head.*]

Then, as a favor to me, I want to ask you to think it over. I know that Guy is a young fool, and wants licking into shape. I admire you for refusing him. It does credit to your intelligence and your sex. But I shall be lost without you, Jane. Won't you be kind enough to change your mind? Won't you marry him and lick him into shape, to oblige me? I'll help you to do so, if you'll tell me how. At present I haven't the faintest idea how to set about it.

JANE. [*Shaking her head*] I should like to be able to, as you ask me so nicely, but I couldn't marry him possibly. Not for anything in the world.

MEREDEW. [*Looking at her hopelessly*] Are you engaged to anyone else?

JANE. [*Turning her face away*] No.

MEREDEW. Guy is not a *bad* lad. He means well. He's only very young and stupid. Don't you think that together we might knock something into him? [*He begins to walk up and down again, struggling to find a way out.*]

JANE. [*Not raising her eyes, softly*] Perhaps we might . . . together.

[MEREDEW *doesn't apparently hear. He continues pacing with bent head. Suddenly he stops and gasps, big with a new idea, looks at* JANE, *gets very nervous and fidgets a little.*]

MEREDEW. God bless my soul! [*Marches straight up to the looking-glass and peers at himself from different angles. Then goes to her and puts both his hands on her shoulders.*] The worst has come to the worst, I cannot afford to lose you . . .! Jane . . . will you marry *me*?

JANE. [*Raises her head, looks at him for a moment, then places a hand on each of his cheeks, pulls his head down, and kisses him.*]

[*An expression of amazement crosses* MEREDEW'S *face.*]

MEREDEW. God bless my soul! [*He stands looking at her for a moment. Then he walks quickly away, wipes his face with a handkerchief, stops, looks at her, and goes back to her. Then he takes her face in both his hands and kisses her.*] Good . . . good . . . splendid! [*He walks about, shooting his cuffs, very pleased with himself, then he stops and looks at her again.*] Now I can dictate that letter at last.

[JANE *goes across and sits at typewriter.*]

[*Dictating*] "June the twenty-third, ninteen twenty-six. Dear Jane . . ."

[JANE *looks up with a smile.*]

God bless my soul! . . . Ha! ha! "Dear Sir, . . . Er . . . In reply to your favor of yesterday's date . . . it will give me great pleasure to undertake . . .

[*The door opens and* GUY *enters. He is scowling with rage, stalks to fireplace, snatches up pipe, and walks back.*]

[MEREDEW *takes no notice and goes on dictating.*] the negotiations for the purchase of the estate in question. Will you be good enough to call . . ."

JANE. [*Seeing* GUY] One moment, dearest.

MEREDEW. [*Startled*] Eh? What . . . Oh, yes. [*He beams.*]

[GUY, *hearing her remark, stops and stares from one to the other with his mouth open.*]

JANE. Guy! . . . You may be interested to hear that instead of becoming your wife, I'm going to be your stepmother.

GUY. Well, I'm . . . [*He remains staring, then breaks into an odd grin, and goes toward them.*] Then I *can* kiss you now—without penalty.

MEREDEW. [*Goes quickly to him and catches him by the shoulders just as he is bending over Jane.*] I'll be hanged if you can! [*He whisks him away.*]

JANE. Go and see if mother would like one, Guy dear.

CURTAIN

TRIFLES[1]

BY

SUSAN GLASPELL

The results achieved by the Little Theater movement in America are due, in large measure, to the Provincetown Players, in which coterie Miss Glaspell was a pioneer leader and in which she displayed her surprising dramatic talent. Susan Glaspell comes from the Middle West—from Iowa. She has contributed short stories to various magazines and has written novels; but first and foremost she is a writer for the stage. Her plays are gaining recognition abroad; English publishers have brought out practically all of her dramatic work, and productions, professional and amateur, are frequent in Great Britain. Her longer plays include *The Verge*, *Inheritors*, and *Bernice*. Her shorter published plays, besides the example which follows, are *The People*, *Close the Book*, *The Outside*, *Woman's Honor*, and, in collaboration with her husband, George Cram Cook, *Suppressed Desires* and *Tickless Time*.

In spite of its title, *Trifles* is a tragedy,—one of the most poignant, yet simple, dramas written by an American. It is by the apparently casual talk of two women, who have the stage most of the time, that the depths of human nature are opened up and we divine the whole story of a wife driven to desperation by cruelty and neglect. The audience sees neither the tragic deed nor the persons concerned. Miss Glaspell appeared in the cast when *Trifles* was first performed at Provincetown, Massachusetts, August 8, 1916.

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CHARACTERS

George Henderson, *county attorney*
Henry Peters, *sheriff*
Lewis Hale, *a neighboring farmer*
Mrs. Peters
Mrs. Hale

TRIFLES

SCENE: *The kitchen in the now abandoned farmhouse of* JOHN WRIGHT, *a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table, and other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens and the* SHERIFF *comes in, followed by the* COUNTY ATTORNEY *and* HALE. *The* SHERIFF *and* HALE *are men in middle life; the* COUNTY ATTORNEY *is a young man. All are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women—the* SHERIFF'S *wife first. She is a slight, wiry woman, with a thin nervous face.* MRS. HALE *is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks about fearfully as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.*

COUNTY ATTORNEY. [*Rubbing his hands*] This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

MRS. PETERS. [*After taking a step forward*] I'm not—cold.

SHERIFF. [*Unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business*] Now, Mr. Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr. Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

SHERIFF. [*Looking about*] It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us—no use getting pneumonia with a big case on, but I told him not to touch anything except the stove—and you know Frank.

County Attorney. Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

Sheriff. Oh—yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy—I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today, and as long as I went over everything here myself—

County Attorney. Well, Mr. Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

Hale. Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place and as I got here I said, "I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone." I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet—I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John—

County Attorney. Let's talk about that later, Mr. Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

Hale. I didn't hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say, "Come in." I wasn't sure, I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door—this door [*Indicating the door by which the two women are still standing*] and there in that rocker—[*Pointing to it*] sat Mrs. Wright.

[*They all look at the rocker.*]

County Attorney. What—was she doing?

Hale. She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of—pleating it.

County Attorney. And how did she—look?

Hale. Well, she looked queer.

County Attorney. How do you mean—queer?

HALE. Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. How did she seem to feel about your coming?

HALE. Why, I don't think she minded—one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, "How do, Mrs. Wright, it's cold, ain't it?" And she said, "Is it?"—and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, "I want to see John." And then she—laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: "Can't I see John?" "No," she says, kind o' dull like. "Ain't he home?" says I. "Yes," says she, "he's home." "Then why can't I see him?" I asked her, out of patience. "'Cause he's dead," says she. "*Dead?*" says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. "Why—where is he?" says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs—like that [*Himself pointing to the room above*]. I got up, with the idea of going up there. I walked from there to here—then I says, "Why, what did he die of?" "He died of a rope round his neck," says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might—need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin'—

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I think I'd rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

HALE. Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked . . . [*Stops, his face twitches.*] . . . but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, "No, he's dead all right, and we'd better not touch anything." So we went back downstairs. She was still sitting that same way. "Has anybody been notified?" I asked. "No," says she, unconcerned. "Who did this, Mrs. Wright?" said Harry. He said it businesslike—and she stopped pleatin' of her apron. "I don't know," she says. "You don't *know?*" says Harry.

"No," says she. "Weren't you sleepin' in the bed with him?" says Harry. "Yes," says she, "but I was on the inside." "Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn't wake up?" says Harry. "I didn't wake up," she said after him. We must 'a looked as if we didn't see how that could be, for after a minute she said, "I sleep sound." Harry was going to ask her more questions but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers' place, where there's a telephone.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And what did Mrs. Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?

HALE. She moved from that chair to this one over here [*Pointing to a small chair in the corner*] and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me—scared. [*The* COUNTY ATTORNEY, *who has had his notebook out, makes a note.*] I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr. Lloyd came, and you, Mr. Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. [*Looking around*] I guess we'll go upstairs first—and then out to the barn and around there. [*To the* SHERIFF] You're convinced that there was nothing important here—nothing that would point to any motive.

SHERIFF. Nothing here but kitchen things.

[*The* COUNTY ATTORNEY, *after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Here's a nice mess.

[*The women draw nearer.*]

MRS. PETERS. [*To the other woman*] Oh, her fruit; it did freeze. [*To the* COUNTY ATTORNEY] She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF. Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE. Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

[*The two women move a little closer together.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. [*With the gallantry of a young politician*] And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? [*The women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and, pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place.*] Dirty towels! [*Kicks his foot against the pans under the sink.*] Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS. HALE. [*Stiffly*] There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. To be sure. And yet [*With a little bow to her*] I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller-towels. [*He gives it a pull to expose its full length again.*]

MRS. HALE. Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends too.

MRS. HALE. [*Shaking her head*] I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house—it's more than a year.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And why was that? You didn't like her?

MRS. HALE. I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr. Henderson. And then—

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Yes—?

MRS. HALE. [*Looking about*] It never seemed a very cheerful place.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. No—it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the home-making instinct.

MRS. HALE. Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. You mean that they didn't get on very well?

MRS. HALE. No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now. [*He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door.*]

SHERIFF. I suppose anything Mrs. Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs. Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mr. Henderson.

[*The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen.*]

MRS. HALE. I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticizing. [*She arranges the pans under sink, which the* COUNTY ATTORNEY *had shoved out of place.*]

MRS. PETERS. Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS. HALE. Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. [*Gives the roller-towel a pull.*] Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

MRS. PETERS. [*Who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted one end of a towel that covers a pan*] She had bread set. [*She stands still.*]

MRS. HALE. [*Eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it.*] She was going to put this in there. [*Picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things.*] It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. [*Gets up on the chair and looks.*] I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs. Peters. Yes—here; [*Holding it toward the window*] this is cher-

ries, too. [*Looking again*] I declare, I believe that's the only one. [*Gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside.*] She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer. [*She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room. With a sigh, she is about to sit down in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated she realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, she steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth.*]

MRS. PETERS. Well, I must get those things from the front-room closet. [*She goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back.*] You coming with me, Mrs. Hale? You could help me carry them.

[*They go in the other room; they reappear,* MRS. PETERS *carrying a dress and skirt,* MRS. HALE *following with a pair of shoes.*]

MRS. PETERS. My, it's cold in there. [*She puts the clothes on the big table, and hurries to the stove.*]

MRS. HALE. [*Examining the skirt*] Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies' Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that—oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take in?

MRS. PETERS. She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. [*She opens stair door and looks.*] Yes, here it is. [*She quickly shuts door leading upstairs.*]

MRS. HALE. [*Abruptly moving toward her*] Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. Do you think she did it?

MRS. PETERS. [*In a frightened voice*] Oh, I don't know.

MRS. HALE. Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS. PETERS. [*Starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice*] Mr. Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr. Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech, and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

MRS. HALE. Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS. PETERS. No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a—funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

MRS. HALE. That's just what Mr. Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS. PETERS. Mr. Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or—sudden feeling.

MRS. HALE. [*Who is standing by the table*] Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here. [*She puts her hand on the dish-towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy.*] It's wiped to here. [*She makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the bread-box. She drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things*] Wonder how they are finding things upstairs. I hope she had it a little more red-up up there. You know, it seems kind of *sneaking*. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

MRS. PETERS. But Mrs. Hale, the law is the law.

MRS. HALE. I s'pose 'tis. [*Unbuttoning her coat*] Better loosen up your things, Mrs. Peters. You won't feel them when you go out.

[MRS. PETERS *takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.*]

MRS. PETERS. She was piecing a quilt. [*She brings the large sewing-basket, and they look at the bright pieces.*]

MRS. HALE. It's log-cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?

[*Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The* SHERIFF *enters, followed by* HALE *and the* COUNTY ATTORNEY.]

SHERIFF. They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it!

[*The men laugh, the women look abashed.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. [*Rubbing his hands over the stove*] Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up.

[*The men go outside.*]

MRS. HALE. [*Resentfully*] I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. [*She sits down at the big table, smoothing out a block with decision.*] I don't see as it's anything to laugh about.

MRS. PETERS. [*Apologetically*] Of course they've got awful important things on their minds. [*She pulls up a chair and joins* MRS. HALE *at the table.*]

MRS. HALE. [*Examining another block*] Mrs. Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!

[*After she has said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant* MRS. HALE *has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing.*]

MRS. PETERS. Oh, what are you doing, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. [*Mildly*] Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. [*Threading a needle*] Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

MRS. PETERS. [*Nervously*] I don't think we ought to touch things.

MRS. HALE. I'll just finish up this end. [*Suddenly stopping and leaning forward*] Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

MRS. PETERS. Oh—I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired.

[MRS. HALE *starts to say something, looks at* MRS. PETERS, *then goes on sewing.*]

Well, I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think. [*Putting apron and other things together*] I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

MRS. HALE. In that cupboard, maybe.

MRS. PETERS. [*Looking in cupboard*] Why, here's a bird-cage. [*She holds it up.*] Did she have a bird, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. Why, I don't know whether she did or not—I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

MRS. PETERS. [*Glancing around*] Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it.

MRS. HALE. I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

MRS. PETERS. No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats—being afraid of them. My cat got in her room, and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

MRS. HALE. My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS. PETERS. [*Examining the cage*] Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

MRS. HALE. [*Looking, too*] Looks as if someone must have been rough with it.

MRS. PETERS. Why, yes. [*She brings the cage forward and puts it on the table.*]

MRS. HALE. I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

MRS. PETERS. But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

MRS. HALE. It would, wouldn't it? [*Dropping her sewing*] But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when *she* was here. I—[*Looking around the room*]—wish I had.

MRS. PETERS. But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale—your house and your children.

MRS. HALE. I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful—and that's why I ought to have come. I—I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now—[*She shakes her head.*]

MRS. PETERS. Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs. Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until—something comes up.

MRS. HALE. Not having children makes less work—but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

MRS. HALE. Yes—good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs. Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him— [*She shivers.*] Like a raw wind that gets to the bone. [*She pauses, her eye falling on the cage.*] I should think she would 'a wanted a bird. But where do you suppose it went?

MRS. PETERS. I don't know, unless it got sick and died.

[*She reaches over and swings the broken door of the cage, swings it again. Both women watch it.*]

MRS. HALE. You weren't raised round here, were you?

[MRS. PETERS *shakes her head.*]

You didn't know—her?

MRS. PETERS. Not till they brought her yesterday.

MRS. HALE. She—come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself—real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and—fluttery. How—she—did—change. [*Silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to everyday things.*] Tell you what, Mrs. Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

MRS. PETERS. Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs. Hale. There couldn't possibly be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here—and her things.

[*They look in the sewing-basket.*]

MRS. HALE. Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in it. [*She brings out a fancy box.*] What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give you. Maybe her scissors are in here. [*She opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose.*] Why—

[MRS. PETERS *bends nearer, then turns her face away.*]

There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

MRS. PETERS. Why, this isn't her scissors.

MRS. HALE. [*Lifting the silk*] Oh, Mrs. Peters—it's—

[MRS. PETERS *bends closer.*]

MRS. PETERS. It's the bird.

MRS. HALE. [*Jumping up*] But, Mrs. Peters—look at it! It's neck! Look at its neck. It's all—other side *to.*

MRS. PETERS. Somebody—wrung—its—neck.

[*Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension, of horror. Steps are heard outside.* MRS. HALE *slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair.*]

[*Enter* SHERIFF *and* COUNTY ATTORNEY. MRS. PETERS *rises.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. [*As one turning from serious things to little pleasantries*] Well, ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

MRS. PETERS. We think she was going to—knot it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. [*Seeing the bird-cage*] Has the bird flown?

MRS. HALE. [*Putting more quilt pieces over the box*] We think the—cat got it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. [*Preoccupied*] Is there a cat?

[MRS. HALE *glances in a quick, covert way at* MRS. PETERS.]

MRS. PETERS. Well, not *now*. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. [*To* SHERIFF PETERS, *continuing an interrupted conversation*] No sign at all of anyone's having come from the outside. Their own rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece.

[*They start upstairs.*]

It would have to have been someone who knew just the—

[MRS. PETERS *sits down. The two women sit there, not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they cannot help saying it.*]

MRS. HALE. She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

MRS. PETERS. [*In a whisper*] When I was a girl—my kitten—there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes—and before I could get there—[*Covers her face an instant.*] If they hadn't held me back I would have—[*She catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly.*]—hurt him.

MRS. HALE. [*With a slow look around her*] I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around. [*Pause.*] No, Wright wouldn't like the bird—a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that too.

MRS. PETERS. [*Moving uneasily*] We don't know who killed the bird.

MRS. HALE. I knew John Wright.

MRS. PETERS. It was an awful thing was done in this house that

night, Mrs. Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

MRS. HALE. His neck. Choked the life out of him. [*Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage.*]

MRS. PETERS. [*With rising voice*] We don't know who killed him. We don't *know*.

MRS. HALE. [*Her own feeling not interrupted*] If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful—still, after the bird was still.

MRS. PETERS. [*Something within her speaking*] I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then—

MRS. HALE. [*Moving*] How soon do you suppose they'll be through—looking for the evidence?

MRS. PETERS. I know what stillness is. [*Pulling herself back*] The law has got to punish crime, Mrs. Hale.

MRS. HALE. [*Not as if answering that*] I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. [*A look around the room.*] Oh, I *wish* I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

MRS. PETERS. [*Looking upstairs*] We mustn't—take on.

MRS. HALE. I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be—for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs. Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it's all just a different kind of the same thing. [*She brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it.*] If I was you I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it *ain't*. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She—she may never know whether it was broke or not.

MRS. PETERS. [*Takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice*] My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing

like a—dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with —with—wouldn't they *laugh!*

[*The men are heard coming downstairs.*]

MRS. HALE. [*Under her breath*] Maybe they would—maybe they wouldn't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show—something to make a story about—a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it—

[*The women's eyes meet for an instant.*]

[*Enter* HALE *from outer door.*]

HALE. Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I'm going to stay here awhile by myself. [*To the* SHERIFF] You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

SHERIFF. Do you want to see what Mrs. Peters is going to take in?

[*The* COUNTY ATTORNEY *goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. [*Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back.*] No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Not—just that way.

SHERIFF. [*Chuckling*] Married to the law. [*He moves toward the other room.*] I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. [*Scoffingly*] Oh, windows!

SHERIFF. We'll be right out, Mr. Hale.

[HALE *goes outside. The* SHERIFF *follows the* COUNTY ATTORNEY *into the other room. Then* MRS. HALE *rises,*

hands tight together, looking intensely at MRS. PETERS, *whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting* MRS. HALE'S. *A moment* MRS. HALE *holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly* MRS. PETERS *throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room.* MRS. HALE *snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat.*]

[*Enter* COUNTY ATTORNEY *and* SHERIFF.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. [*Facetiously*] Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to—what is it you call it, ladies?

MRS. HALE. [*Her hand against her pocket*] We call it—knot it, Mr. Henderson.

CURTAIN

PEGGY[1]

BY

RACHEL CROTHERS

Rachel Crothers, one of the distinguished dramatists of America, now directs the production of her own plays. She is a graduate of the State Normal School in Illinois, her native state, and has taught elocution. At first a member of an amateur dramatic society, Miss Crothers later joined a professional company and thus had some years of practical stage experience. At a very early age she began the writing of short plays, and while she was an advanced pupil in a school of acting the first of them was produced. In 1906 her significant play *The Three of Us* brought a new author before the theater-going public. Since then, as a professional dramatist, Miss Crother's efforts have succeeded brilliantly. The plays which have contributed most to this record of accomplishment appeared in the following sequence: *The Coming of Mrs. Patrick* (1907); *Myself Bettina* (1908); *A Man's World* (1910); *He and She* (1912), revived (1920); *Ourselves* (1913); *Young Wisdom* (1914); *The Heart of Paddy-Whack* (1914); *Old Lady 31* (1916); *Once Upon a Time* (1917); *A Little Journey* (1918); *39 East* (1919); *Nice People* (1921); *Everyday* (1921); *Mary the 3d* (1923); *Expressing Willie* (1925); and *A Lady's Virtue* (1926).

Peggy is a well-observed situation in which the author reflects the power of inherited tendencies. It is a characteristic example of the persistent effort which Miss Crothers has made in her work for the stage to present the claim of woman's nature for its proper fulfillment.

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CHARACTERS

ANGELINE, *Little Dan's aunt*
HARRIETTE, *Little Dan's aunt*
AMY, *aunt "in law" to Little Dan*
PEGGY (MRS. DAN RAYMOND), *stepmother and guardian to Little Dan*
WORTHINGTON, *Little Dan's uncle*
LAURENCE, *Little Dan's uncle*
DAN RAYMOND (LITTLE DAN), *Peggy's stepson*

PEGGY

SCENE: *An old house, a short way out of Philadelphia. The room is mellow with age and fine taste, and there is a subdued glowing under the sheen of the old woods and brasses that is felt rather than seen. The same restrained beauty is in the woman who sits in one of the charming chairs, waiting tensely, with long delicate hands clasped in unresigned resignation. The room has never quite let go—never flowed into the abandon of luxury and sensuous comfort, and the woman who has lived in it has the same subdued gleam, that might have been radiant had she let the inner spark burn. Her brother is much like her outwardly, but hardened into middle age with a fine hard polish which has no regrets and no doubts of its own fineness.*

[*As the curtain rises he is pacing the room with long strides which indicate an aggrieved and superior irritation that anything should keep him waiting.*]

WORTHINGTON. I've been foolish enough to think that just once—just once—for a thing as important as this, some of them might have done what I asked.

ANGELINE. [*In a voice whose sweetness and steadiness control its unfulfilled longings*] Busy people don't realize what waiting means to people like us.

WORTHINGTON. Busy people? They're only busy with their own self-importance.

ANGELINE. There's a train from New York every hour, isn't there?

WORTHINGTON. Certainly.

ANGELINE. They're sure to be here on the next one.

WORTHINGTON. And there's no excuse under heaven for Har-

riette. There's a train out from Philadelphia every thirty minutes. I tried to impress them with the necessity of getting here before the woman herself does—but I might as well try to impress the wind as Harriette, and Laurence would make a point of being late to show me how much better he can handle the thing than I can.

ANGELINE. Oh, no, something has detained him.

WORTHINGTON. He shouldn't have allowed anything to detain him. If we let her slip through our fingers this time, we'll never get her again—never. It's only the diplomacy of my letters that has got her now. She's curious and ready to listen. She wants to hear what I have to say.

ANGELINE. I hope so. [*Looking at the tall clock*] But it *is* late. Oh, there's a motor. [*She braces herself without rising.* WORTHINGTON *stops walking, but does not go to the door.*]

[*A motor is heard on the gravel beyond the low veranda, after a moment a quick assertive step, and* HARRIETTE *appears in full sail, a tall, long-lined woman who has made so much of her good points that she seems handsome.*]

WORTHINTON. [*Going on with his walk*] Oh, it's only Harriette.

HARRIETTE. [*As she comes through the open door*] I'm not late, am I? Where are the others? Don't tell me I'm the only one here. That's maddening. I could have stayed longer. I ran away from the nicest luncheon party.

WORTHINGTON. Didn't a motor just drive up?

HARRIETTE. Of course. I motored out. Mrs. Rittenhouse gave me her car. She *is* so sweet about it. I almost feel as though it were mine now. What's the matter, Angeline, you look as if you had a cramp. You're nervous, of course—so am I—horribly—but don't be. She'll give up. If you'll just let me do the talking, Worthington—I know better than any of you what to say—and I have a better *right* than any of you to ask what we're going to ask. [*She has seated herself on a long sofa and more or less filled that side of the room with her personality and her effects—her gloves one place, her purse and trinkets another. She makes a*

critical and satisfied inspection of her complexion in a small mirror, and the extremely long earrings bob and vibrate, adding to her all-pervading, all embracing restlessness.]

WORTHINGTON. The best thing you can possibly do is to keep still, Harriette, you'll irritate—

HARRIETTE. Yes, of course you think *you're* the one to talk. What can you say that has any weight at all? Here you are—you and Angeline—an old maid and an old bachelor—with just barely so much money. How can you ask for the child? What do you want with him, anyway? What would you do with him if you—

ANGELINE. But it doesn't matter who has him—just so we *get* him. That can be settled afterward.

HARRIETTE. Oh, but it does matter—and it's *my* case and *my* argument that will get him. I'm married and have no children. Obviously, I'm the one to have my brother's child. Who else? Laurence has more children now than he knows what to do with. If all of you will only *see* that, and throw your weight on my side, we'll—

ANGELINE. [*Rising and going towards the outer door*] There's the motor.

HARRIETTE. Heavens, I'm terribly excited. Now, do keep cool and don't lose your heads. Sit down, Angeline. Don't let her think you're — Oh, Lord, it's Laurence and Amy! Why on earth did he bring Amy? She'll ruin it if she sticks in. Actually she gets a bigger fool every year.

ANGELINE. Careful! They'll hear you. Come in, Amy dear. Come in, Laurence.

[*Enter* LAURENCE *and* AMY.]

LAURENCE. [*Who is short and thick and therefore obliged to add to his height by a tall manner*] Is she here?

HARRIETTE. She isn't, but I am. Hello, Laurence. Hello, Amy.

LAURENCE. How are you, Harriette? [*Nodding to* HARRIETTE *and shaking hands with* ANGELINE *and* WORTHINGTON]

AMY. [*Trailing limply after* LAURENCE] Oh, hello, Harriette dear. Hello, Angeline dear. [*She kisses the two women with fussy*

sweetness and subsides in a chair, pushing back a lock of her dull hair where it will not stay.]

ANGELINE. Wasn't there any—Wasn't she on that train?

LAURENCE. I didn't see anybody get off.

ANGELINE. Send the car right back to the station, Worthington. She'll surely be on the next one.

[WORTHINGTON *goes out on the veranda to give the direction.*]

HARRIETTE. [*Still on the sofa*] Your hat's crooked, Amy, and why did you get another drab one? And a hairpin's coming out. Laurence, I say if you'll only let me do the talking, I know just how to approach —

LAURENCE. And if you'll only keep still, Harriette, that's the best thing you can do. It's got to be handled in a businesslike—

HARRIETTE. Of course that's what you *would* say. Business has nothing to do with the case. It's going to take tact and a great deal of finesse and cleverness. Now wait, *wait*—do let me say *something* just *once.*

LAURENCE. We didn't come over here to hear you talk, Harriette. Worthington, listen to me.

[*As* WORTHINGTON *comes back from the veranda.*]

I tell you this thing has got to be tackled from a legal standpoint. [*Sitting rigidly and legally by a table*]

HARRIETTE. Slush!

WORTHINGTON. I don't see that there's anything *legal* about it.

[ANGELINE *stands anxiously by the open door, looking out.* WORTHINGTON *moves about a little—restlessly.*]

HARRIETTE. Of course there isn't. It's going to take tact—tact—and a great deal of insight and intuition, which neither of you has a drop of in your—

WORTHINGTON. Oh, bosh, Harriette! It's the justice and fitness of things that have to be—

HARRIETTE. Much she cares about justice and fitness! She's a —a something you people don't know anything about. Harry saw her dance in New York last week and she's perfectly—

LAURENCE. Now let me tell you at the go-off Harry has nothing to do with this. No voice in it at—

HARRIETTE. He doesn't want to have, and he had the good taste to stay away. He knows the in-laws have nothing to say whatever. [*Raising her chin at* AMY]

AMY. [*Whimpering*] I only came for the trip—for a little outing. I'm so tired, I—

LAURENCE. That will do, Amy. I tell you, I've got to get at it from a legal—[*Bringing his fist down on the table*]

HARRIETTE. Now wait till I finish—just *once*, Laurence, *please*, if you can let somebody else say something.

ANGELINE. Go on, Harriette, do.

HARRIETTE. Harry saw her, as I say, and she's perfectly marvelous. And he says we're fools not to take her up—recognize her while she's a success. People are mad about her, you know.

ANGELINE. Take her up? What do you mean? [*Turning back into the room*]

HARRIETTE. Know her—invite her here—

[*There is a quick protest from them all.*]

Now *wait*—make it *smart* to know her—so people can't say we're ashamed of her. That's the only thing in the world that will flatter her. She won't care anything about any money we could put up. She can get money easily enough, you know. She's had several fortunes spent on her already.

AMY. Oh, my! What are we going to call her?

HARRIETTE. Peggy, of course. Why not? That's what everybody else calls her.

WORTHINGTON. Just avoid calling her anything. I refuse absolutely to know her at all—except for the necessity of this interview.

LAURENCE. Certainly. If you begin muddling it with personal stuff, Harriette, there'll be no end to it. She has no *legal*—

WORTHINGTON. I'm not so sure about that. If she's got anything in writing to show that Dan gave the child to her—

AMY. Oh, he couldn't do that. He couldn't give away his own flesh and blood to a woman like *that!*

HARRIETTE. A woman like that! Don't be a ninny, Amy. Of course he gave her everything he had. She's just the kind men *do* give everything to. And, after all, he did marry her. Don't forget that.

ANGELINE. Of course he married her. I don't believe there was ever anything else. [*Sitting again*]

HARRIETTE. Oh, piffle, Angeline! Wake up. Wake up.

ANGELINE. After all, she *is* his stepmother, and we wouldn't have dreamed of taking him away from his own mother.

AMY. Of course not—his own mother was a lady.

HARRIETTE. Yes, she certainly was—a lady and a *fish*. You know, I never did blame Dan in my heart of hearts for swinging to the other extreme after his years with Laura. Now, see here, *I* won't mind knowing this woman, Peggy—you know. I won't mind it at all, and if you'll let me *alone*, I'll get him away from her in my own way. Now, *wait—please*.

[*As they all protest again.*]

Harry's father has always been perfectly rabid on the children business. He hasn't given us a cent for years, and if I took this child—a real Raymond—it would be the next thing to having one of my own, and the old gent would thaw. I know it.

AMY. Oh, my!

WORTHINGTON. Looking out for your *own* interests, of course, Harriette. What about us—Angeline and me?

LAURENCE. Well, if I may be allowed to say something—after all, I'm the head of the family. That's what you all seem to have forgotten entirely.

HARRIETTE. Oh, no, you never *let* us forget that, Laurence dear.

LAURENCE. Are you going to begin again?

HARRIETTE. Oh, no—no—go on—go on.

LAURENCE. I want a boy. I ought to have one.

AMY. Oh, Laurie, you know you wouldn't exchange our five dear little girls for all the boys in the world.

LAURENCE. I didn't say anything about exchanging them. Now, see here, I'm prepared to put up more than the rest of you.

HARRIETTE. Then that's taking a mean advantage of me. Money isn't everything, and I have social position to give him. That means more than all the—

WORTHINGTON. Poppycock! *This* is the place for him. This is the old home where Dan would have wanted him to be.

LAURENCE. Dan would have wanted him to be in New York and be brought up like a *man*. I know well enough what Dan wanted!

ANGELINE. Dan evidently wanted her to have him. That's what we haven't taken into consideration at all.

[*They all speak at once in voluble protest at this, their voices rising.* ANGELINE *suddenly hushes them; they stop and turn to look at the woman who stands in the doorway with a boy of ten, whom she holds tightly by one hand. They are not able to speak to her at once, but stare at her, because of the warm magnetism of her lithe body, her white throat, and the red hair—a strong irresistible force by which they are checked, and which they instinctively resent.*]

ANGELINE. [*Rising and going a little towards the woman*] Are you—

PEGGY. [*In a warm, throaty voice*] I'm Mrs. Dan Raymond.

AMY. Why, how little Dannie's grown!

[*She pounces upon the boy and draws him into the room. The others surround him, all talking at once.*]

HARRIETTE. I'm your Aunt Harriette. You remember me, don't you, dearest?

AMY. And I'm your Aunt Amy, Dannie dear.

HARRIETTE. Oh, don't call him *Dannie!*

AMY. Wouldn't you like to come and live with me and be a big brother to my five little girls?

LAURENCE. [*Pushing* AMY *aside and taking the boy's hand*] Keep still, Amy. How are you, boy? I'm your Uncle Laurence. I live in New York. You remember me, of course, don't you?

WORTHINGTON. And I'm your Uncle Worthington. This is where you used to come and stay when you were a baby. Remember?

DAN. Peggy!

[*He calls to her sharply and, pushing away from the others, goes back to her side, standing a little back of her and holding her arm. A flash of pride and satisfaction softens her face, and she throws a protecting arm about him.*]

ANGELINE. Did you—did the chauffeur find you? We sent the car.

PEGGY. We walked. Nobody seemed to be looking for us.

ANGELINE. Oh, I'm so sorry. Sit over here, won't you?

PEGGY. [*Moving to the chair with rather insolent grace*] I can't stay long. I have to get back, you know.

[DAN *goes to stand beside her.*]

HARRIETTE. Oh, we hoped you might stay over. At least, I did. So we'd get to know you and see how you—how you feel about things, you know. You will stay, won't you? [*Sitting near* PEGGY]

PEGGY. [*With a very keen look at* HARRIETTE] I'm working, you know.

HARRIETTE. Dancing, you mean. My husband saw you last week in New York, and he says you're *perfectly marvelous.* I say he says you're *mar-vel-ous!*

[PEGGY *doesn't seem to hear this, but she watches them all with probing eyes. These eyes are smuggy and blue, and under their suspicion and hardness is a very great wistfulness and fear.*]

ANGELINE. Shan't we have some tea? You must be tired.

PEGGY. No, thanks.

LAURENCE. No, no, I'm sure she wants us to be as businesslike as possible and get at things.

WORTHINGTON. As I wrote you, I have something of very great value to offer you.

HARRIETTE. *I* have—of *very* great.

LAURENCE. What I have to present is a very definite proposition. It's this way—

PEGGY. It's about Dan—little Dan isn't it?

[*There is a pause.* LAURENCE *clears his throat, and lifting a chair places it before* PEGGY *and sits with an air of being about to settle all unsettled things.*]

LAURENCE. He must be a great burden to you. We want to relieve you of that.

AMY. [*Sitting on the edge of a chair and peering curiously at* PEGGY] Yes, that's it, Laurie.

PEGGY. What?

WORTHINGTON. Now, let me explain. We don't expect you to be entirely disinterested. [*Moving closer to* PEGGY]

HARRIETTE. Oh, but there's so much more than money to be considered. When I think of what I can give him, money seems horribly—

WORTHINGTON. The child has inherited something vastly more important than money. I wondered if you wouldn't see that, if you came here. I wondered if you didn't want him to have it—the—the fineness of his inheritance.

PEGGY. [*Some of the hardness and suspicion relaxing and the wistfulness increasing*] Yes, I do want him to have it. That's why I came. I want him to have what belongs to him, and what you people can give him. Oh, I can take care of him. That isn't it. It's the other things—that are his—that I don't want him to lose because of—of me.

LAURENCE. [*Relieved and jerking his chair closer to* PEGGY] Oh, well, then that's very good. We didn't know just what your attitude would be.

PEGGY. [*Speaking slowly and nervously but with great simplicity and honesty—rolling her handkerchief into a tight little ball in one hand*] No, I s'pose not. While Dan was alive I never thought anything about you. He had enough of all this you're talking about—to give little Dan. But after he was gone it was different. I began to think about what the boy wouldn't have now—without his father—and—and when I got your letter I decided to let—Well, I said, if they've held out a friendly hand, I must take it—for the boy's sake—not for mine—mind you. *I* don't want any of this—but I'm perfectly willing to let you see Dan some—to even

let him come and visit you just so often. I mean, regularly, you know—and for you to pick out his school and that kind of thing—and I'm doing it—not just for the boy—but for Dan. That's what I owe to him—and I'll go through with it.

[*The thing that breaks her voice and comes into her face is so startling that* ANGELINE *lowers her head and even the others turn their eyes away.* DAN *leans more closely against* PEGGY.]

LAURENCE. [*After a pause*] Well, then, as I say, that's very good. We thought he might be a burden to you; but if you're willing to give him up for his own sake, why that's so much the better.

PEGGY. Give him up?

HARRIETTE. Oh, now, if he came to me, I wouldn't insist upon that—*absolutely.*

LAURENCE. There couldn't be any going back and forth. That's impossible. It's—— The two things wouldn't go together at all.

PEGGY. [*Something ugly coming into a corner of her mouth*] Oh, you don't want any of him then?

LAURENCE. Don't misunderstand me. We mean for his sake he would have to be under our care entirely—come to us entirely.

HARRIETTE. Now, Laurence, I tell you—

WORTHINGTON. Don't, Harriette. [*To* PEGGY] Of course, you know as well as we do the two a—atmospheres couldn't be mixed. It—a—a child has to have one thing or the other, and in this case there is no doubt as to which it must be. This house is—as I say, his inheritance—his birthright—his place where he belongs.

PEGGY. [*Holding* DAN *a little tighter*] What do you mean?

HARRIETTE. You want him to have it. You've said that yourself. You've been splendid.

PEGGY. Are you trying to tell me you want me to give him up? Entirely? To *you?* [*Looking at all of them*]

LAURENCE. Of course we don't expect you to be entirely disinterested. I'm prepared to be fair. I'm prepared to—name a sum that will make you willing to set aside all claims to him whatsoever.

PEGGY. I don't seem to understand.

LAURENCE. I'm prepared to say twenty-five thousand dollars—outright—if he comes to me—with all claims relinquished.

PEGGY. God! [*She rises with a quick movement.*] God, I was a fool to come! Dan always said I was soft.

LAURENCE. Now, now—don't get excited. You have no legal claim to him, you know.

WORTHINGTON. None whatsoever. He's *ours.*

PEGGY. Listen! You cut Dan out entirely when he married me—and now I'm going to cut you out. You can't see little Dan again. You can't write to him—you can't get at him—*any* way. Dan gave him to me—not because he had to—but because he wanted *me* to have him—not *you.*

LAURENCE. We want to settle this without the law if we can, but we'll—

PEGGY. He gave him to me, I tell you. He saw me with him for three years—and he wanted him to be with me. He *wanted* it! Don't be afraid, Dan, they're not going to get you. They're trying to buy you for twenty-five thousand dollars. It's a joke. Come on. We'll go. [*Going to the door*]

AMY. [*Beginning to cry*] Oh, I think it's awful! Poor child!

PEGGY. [*Turning back to them at the door*] Poor child? Do you think I'd leave him here? Not for all the money the whole Raymond tribe could raise. Come on.

[*Their anger and their egos and their wills are now united in their common cause against her. They move towards her—all speaking at once—except* ANGELINE, *who stands aside watching.*]

PEGGY. [*Raising her voice above the excitement of theirs*] There's one of you—Angeline—is that you? Dan always wanted me to see you—and I'd like to speak to you a minute. We'll go just in a minute, Dan. Don't be afraid. [*Clutching* DAN, *who has stayed close to her.*]

ANGELINE. Will you come into the library?

WORTHINGTON. No—no—stay here. We'll go. I hope you know what to say, Angeline. Don't let her browbeat you.

WORTHINGTON, LAURENCE, AMY, *and* HARRIETTE *go into another room, wrangling and arguing as they move.* WORTHINGTON *closes the door heavily.*]

DAN. [*Who has been watching* ANGELINE *most of the time*] Are you my Aunt Angeline?

ANGELINE. [*Flushing with surprise*] Yes.

DAN. Dad said if I ever saw you to give you a kiss for him.

ANGELINE. Oh! [DAN *kisses her cheek. She throws her arms about him and hides her face on his breast.*]

[PEGGY *turns to the window, brushing away the tears that suddenly swim in her eyes.*]

Did he? Did he do that?

DAN. Yes, and he said to tell you he loved you.

PEGGY. [*Standing at the window with her back to the others*] And didn't blame you for anything.

ANGELINE. I'm glad you told me that. [*Putting a timid, hungry hand on his head*]

DAN. Is this the house where my father lived when he was a little boy?

ANGELINE. Yes.

DAN. Like me?

ANGELINE. Yes. So like you—— Oh, he was so like you—I can't tell you.

DAN. [*Slowly looking around the room*] Did he play in this room?

ANGELINE. Yes, dear—in this very room. Some of his books are over there, and I have lots and lots of his toys put away.

DAN. Couldn't I see 'em?

ANGELINE. I'll send them to you.

DAN. Why couldn't I see 'em now?

PEGGY. [*Turning quickly*] Oh, no, Dan—not now.

DAN. Was that his? [*Pointing to a sword on the wall*]

ANGELINE. That was his great-grandfather's.

DAN. Can I have it?

PEGGY. *No*, Dan!

ANGELINE. I'd like you to have it.

PEGGY. [*Coming away from the window*] Dan, you skip outside and pick some of those flowers for us to take back with us. I want to speak to this lady for a minute.

DAN. She's my Aunt Angeline.

PEGGY. Yes, I know, dear. That's why I want to talk to her. Run along. I'll call you in a minute.

ANGELINE. Pick all you want, dear. All you can carry.

[*She puts out a hand to him. He takes it firmly and walks with her to the outer door.* PEGGY *is not at all unaware of the pride and beauty of the two figures as they walk together, and of the poignant things which reach out to* DAN *from the room.* ANGELINE *lets him go and stands watching him as he crosses the grass.*]

PEGGY. The thing I wanted to tell you was this.

ANGELINE. [*Turning back to her*] Yes?

PEGGY. He talked a lot about you. He always said he didn't give a damn about the others, not a tinker's dam, but he wanted me to know you. And then towards the last—when he—knew he was going—he wanted to see you. He never said so—but I knew it. I could have sent for you and I didn't. It's the only rotten thing I ever did to Dan. You've heard plenty of things about me—some of them are true and some of them aren't, but Dan *knew*—and he was happy. I made him happy, I tell you, and we *lived*—and I'm not going to give his boy back to these cold-blooded snobs. Why should I? Little Dan loves me. I'm working for him—I'm living for him. He's big Dan now. I—there isn't anything else on earth that cuts any ice at all with me now but him. They haven't got anything like that to give him—now, have they? All the aristocracy in the world can't do what love can. Now, can it? Their claims don't mean anything beside mine—do they? I love him, you know—that's what I want to get *to* you—and nothing else matters, does it? *You* haven't put in any claim for him. *You* don't think you have any right to him, do you?

[ANGELINE *lowers her eyes.*]

Oh—you do? [*Slipping into a chair mechanically*] You're in it, too—are you? You are all alike, then—after all. And what have *you* got to offer? What do you put up for him?

ANGELINE. [*Moving a chair and sitting close to* PEGGY] I have love, too.

PEGGY. You make me laugh. You've got a kind of family pride, I s'pose, that would like to have him—but nothing that would keep him close—like me—like me. You don't know what my kind of love is. Can't you understand that?

ANGELINE. And what is your kind of love?

PEGGY. What is it?

ANGELINE. Is it great enough to do the best thing for him—no matter how much it hurts you?

PEGGY. You needn't try to talk that to me—sacrifice. I don't believe in it. It's love that counts—human love that *keeps* the thing it loves—and makes it happy. Love doesn't give up.

ANGELINE. I think it sometimes does.

PEGGY. What?

ANGELINE. I could give him up to you if I were sure it were right for *him*.

PEGGY. Oh—you *are* what Dan said. That's big.

ANGELINE. Oh, no, it isn't. I love him and I want him to have what *he* loves.

PEGGY. And I'll *keep* him loving me. Don't be afraid. You can trust me. You see, you couldn't love him the way I do, because you've never had him. You haven't so much to give him as I have.

ANGELINE. Don't you think I have?

PEGGY. I know you haven't; you couldn't have, you've been here so long—alone—proud and quiet, with nothing to hurt you. You're still—and beautiful and—and perfect—but you haven't *lived*. It's when you're out in it—taking it as it comes, and *down* and *hurt*—and then find something to love—that you know what love means. Don't you see, I'll put into Dan all the *best* of everything that the worst has taught me. I know—I know what life is,

and what's worth hanging on to. Don't you see? I have so much more to give him than you have.

ANGELINE. But I have all I *haven't* given. And all I've wanted to give all my life.

PEGGY. Oh, but—he needs—he's like big Dan—he needs the sun. He'd die without it. I'm not all I'd—I'd like him to have. I'm not kidding myself—not a little bit—but don't you see—how lonely he'd be here? Don't you see how empty—how cold you'd seem to him?

[*The two women bend towards each other, speaking in low tones, each unbaring her heart hunger to the other with the intimate abandon of a crisis.*]

ANGELINE. But you don't know how warm the coldness would become for *him*. You don't know how the emptiness would overflow—for *him*. Perhaps my love is stronger than yours because it never *has* had him. All that has never been given to *anyone* I'd give to him.

PEGGY. [*Rising*] Never! You can't have him. I'll never—never—*never* give him up.

ANGELINE. And are you keeping him for his sake or for your own?

PEGGY. He's mine. Why shouldn't I keep him? Come in, Dan. Come in and say good-by. We're going now. [*Going to the door to call him*]

ANGELINE. [*Rising quickly*] But you can't take him away from us like this—and never let us see him again. They *have* a right—all of them.

PEGGY. They haven't. They don't love him. They just want him because they think he's theirs.

ANGELINE. We must compromise. We must all give up something.

PEGGY. I was ready to, but they—

ANGELINE. I know—I know—but they must. Wait—just a minute. I'll speak to them. They must give up something.

PEGGY. All right, ask them. They won't. The way to test their love is through their pocketbooks. They said twenty-five thousand.

Ask them what they say to a hundred thousand. Go on—ask them that and see how much they love him. Go on—I'll wait.

ANGELINE. You will wait—won't you?

PEGGY. I will.

[ANGELINE *hurries out.*]

DAN. [*Coming back into the room*] What's the matter, Peggy?

PEGGY. Nothing, honey. Don't you be afraid. Nothing's going to hurt you.

DAN. Why don't we have flowers like these? [*Showing her the stiff bunch of flowers he holds tightly in his little hot hand*]

PEGGY. I'll buy you all the flowers you want.

DAN. I like to pick 'em.

PEGGY. Do you?

DAN. Why don't we live in this house, Peggy?

PEGGY. Un? [*She is watching the door through which* ANGELINE *went.*]

DAN. She said we could. Aunt Angeline says this is my father's house.

PEGGY. [*Looking at him sharply*] Un? Oh, no, she didn't. She didn't say that, dear.

DAN. She said he lived here when he was a little boy. Why don't we live here?

PEGGY. We couldn't.

DAN. I'd like to.

PEGGY. But you wouldn't want to *stay* here. You like to move—and travel—and see things. Just think where you've been, old man, and what you've seen. Not many boys as little as you have seen the things you have, I tell you, and lived in the grand hotels. [DAN's *eyes slowly take in the room again;* PEGGY *turns him to her quickly.*] Do you like these people, Dan?

DAN. I like Aunt Angeline.

PEGGY. As much as me, Dan? As much as me?

DAN. Ho-o! I *love you!*

PEGGY. How much, Dan? How much?

DAN. Fifty bushels. [PEGGY *catches him to her; he gives her a*

bearlike hug and releases himself.] Couldn't I have that now? [*Pointing to the sword*]

PEGGY. *No.*

DAN. Who's going to have it if I don't, Peggy?

PEGGY. I don't know.

DAN. Have they got any little boys?

PEGGY. No.

DAN. Didn't they say I could have this house if I'd come and live here?

PEGGY. Why do you want it, Dan? Why do you *want* it?

DAN. Because it's mine. Why don't we live in it, Peggy?

PEGGY. They don't want *me.*

DAN. *I* do. *I'd* let you live in it, Peggy.

[*Her hot tears are falling unchecked; she puts her cheek against his hair.*]

PEGGY. Would you, dear?

DAN. Dad said he wanted me to live in this house.

PEGGY. [*Lifting her head quickly*] What? When? When did he say that?

DAN. Lots of times. He said *he* lived in it, and *his* father lived in it—and he wanted my little boy to live in it. Don't you want me to, Peggy?

PEGGY. No.

DAN. Why not, Peggy? I like it better than any place I ever saw.

PEGGY. Oh, God, Dan—don't say that. Would you like to stay here without me?

DAN. No.

PEGGY. We'll go, then, in a minute.

DAN. No, Peggy, I want to stay. I'm the only little boy there is to live here. *My* little boy wouldn't like it if he isn't here. I have to be here so's he can have it. I have to give it to my little boy so he can give it to *his* little boy. Please stay, Peggy. I want to.

PEGGY. [*After a long pause*] Well, listen, honey. You see I can't stay just now—but you can.

DAN. Oh!

PEGGY. Listen, I have to get back because I go on at nine o'clock, and old Craps would give me hell if I wasn't there—wouldn't he? But you can stay, and—and make Aunt Angeline a little visit. Won't that be nice? Just a little one, you know, and see how you like it. Dan—if you—if you ever think I did a mean thing to you—you tell your little boy some day that—I wanted him to live in this——

DAN. What's the matter, Peggy?

PEGGY. Nothing, darling.

DAN. Yes, there is. Don't cry, Peggy.

PEGGY. I won't. Here, you see, I have to beat it or I'll—I want to write a note to your Aunt Angeline, and tell her about it, you know. [*She tears a flyleaf out of a book and writes rapidly.*] There, honey, you give that to her—not to anyone else. [*Folding it in a small bit and thrusting it into his hand*] Now I've got to hurry. Good-by, dear, you stay right there and wait for her.

DAN. I want you to stay, too, Peggy.

PEGGY. Oh, do you, sweetheart—do you? I—well—I—you—good-by, honey. I have to hur—good-b——

[*There are no tears now, but a deep pallor has come into her face. She gives him a long look, goes swiftly to the door, and with a limp wave of her hand is gone.*]

DAN. [*Calling*] Good-by, Peggy. You come back tomorrow.

[*He stands quite still looking after her. The voices of the others are heard as they come back into the room.*]

ANGELINE. Where is she?

DAN. Peggy told me to give this to *you.*

[*He gives the folded paper to* ANGELINE. *She reads it. The paper flutters to the floor. She kneels beside* DAN, *taking his hands with a reverent tenderness. The others are hushed—in the presence of something greater than themselves.*]

CURTAIN

UNCLE JIMMY[1]

BY

ZONA GALE

Except for three years, 1901–1904, when Zona Gale was on the staff of the New York *World*, she has worked in her native environment in Wisconsin. Her representative effort has been the portraiture of Middle-West, middle-class, small-town folks. Her achievements as an author of fiction are a long and brilliant story. If selective emphasis is put on her work for the stage, *Miss Lulu Bett*, dramatized from her novel of the same name, touches greatness. Following the first presentation at the Belmont Theater, New York, it was awarded the Pulitzer drama prize for 1921. Of her shorter plays, *Neighbors* is admirable; it is village life, shot through with tenderness, sympathy, and understanding. *Neighbors* is widely used by nonprofessional organizations and has become a feature in the repertory of the Wisconsin Players and other groups who are leading in the present amateur movement.

The back-dooryard sociability, amusingly pictured in *Uncle Jimmy*, is an opportunity for characterization. In the homely, kindly atmosphere of "Friendship Village," Miss Gale assembles realizable, consistent people, types which appear in her most representative stories. The action is localized in Wisconsin, but in America there are many other neighborhoods where back dooryards are similar meeting-grounds and where the same characters are recognized. *Uncle Jimmy*, like *Neighbors*, is a commendable comedy for amateur groups. Permission for the stage representation of these short plays may be obtained from Miss Gale's representatives, The Walter H. Baker Company, 41 Winter Street, Boston, Mass.

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CHARACTERS

Uncle Jimmy
Mitty
Mis' Amanda Toplady
Calliope Marsh
Mis' Postmaster Sykes
Grandma
Josef
Uncle Rod

UNCLE JIMMY

TIME: *Now.*

PLACE: *A little town in the Middle West.*

SCENE: *The back dooryard of the homes of* CALLIOPE MARSH *and* MIS' AMANDA TOPLADY. *At the right is the side and the back of* CALLIOPE'S *house, set slightly diagonally—a trim white one-story cottage with green blinds. The windows are open and are hung with white-muslin curtains. At the extreme right and front is a shed of weathered boards, having a window and a door, and this shed is connected with the house by a short overhead trellis. At the door of the shed are several armfuls of split wood and a wooden chopping-block, and beside the shed wall is a wooden bench.*

The house has a low side porch, on which is a wire plant-stand filled with pots of flowers and green. By the steps grow pink flowering almond and bleeding heart. To the side of the shed are tacked long white strings, up which morning-glories are beginning to twine. The trellis is covered with blooming wistaria, which also runs onto the roof of the shed. Close to the house and along the picket fence running diagonally at the back are high lilac bushes in a riot of bloom, cut by a picket gate having for its "spring" a rope weighted by a pail of stones.

MIS' TOPLADY'S *house at the left is also white with green blinds, and her porch, three steps up, is set in a mass of yellow flowering currant. Near the front is a tripod supporting an iron kettle, in which pink geraniums are growing. Not far from the gate is a large crab-apple tree in full pink bloom. The street trees, visible over the lilacs, are in fresh green.*

It is spring and early morning and the sun is shining.

[UNCLE JIMMY *is discovered splitting kindling at the block. He is toward seventy, short, not spare, with a fresh-colored, kindly face, clean-shaven, and abundant gray hair not lately cut. He is in shirt sleeves of faded blue, his trousers and waistcoat are shabby but not ragged, and his coat, with an elbow showing the lining, is hanging on the corner of the open shed door. In his waistcoat buttonhole is a spray of yellow flowering currant. He has a soft torn straw hat on the back of his head. As he works he is singing softly:*

"Hey, come along, a Jim along a Jo-sey,
Hey, come along, a Jim along a Joe-Joe-Joe-Joe-Joe."

UNCLE JIMMY. That's the durndest tune I ever see. It allus throws me off headfirst onto "Bye oh, baby"—[*He tries it softly, timing it with his ax and a stick of kindling.*]

[*Enter, from* CALLIOPE'S *shed,* MITTY, *who lives with* CALLIOPE *and works for her board. Her little tight black dress, high-throated and long-sleeved, and her torn and shapeless apron make her unattractive no more than does her tightly-brushed-back hair. In her hand she has a school geography which she closes, keeping her arm in the place.*]

MITTY. Wisconsin is bounded on the north by—Uncle Jimmy, this says Texas is thirteen hundred miles acrost it.

UNCLE JIMMY. I don't b'lieve it. [*He straightens up. A cluster of wistaria is hanging very near him. He breaks it and draws it through the buttonhole of his waistcoat containing the flowering currant.*]

MITTY. It says so.

UNCLE JIMMY. Yah. They ain't that many miles anywheres.

MITTY. Oh, I guess they's more'n that some places. [*Going a little toward* MIS' TOPLADY'S *house*] Mis' Toplady! Mis' Toplady! [*Shouting*] Mis' Toplady!

[MIS' TOPLADY *appears at the door of her house. She is an ample, ponderous, middle-aged woman, with parted and slightly waving gray hair and black-rimmed spectacles, which she constantly looks over or under. She is wearing a dark-blue-calico morning-housework dress, freshly starched and ironed and a little too short for her. She is wiping her hands on her gingham apron.*]

MIS' TOPLADY. Hey! What's wanted?

MITTY. Miss Marsh wants you. [*She reopens her book and goes into* CALLIOPE'S *house by the porch door. She leaves the book open over the rail of the porch.*]

[CALLIOPE MARSH *appears briefly at the shed window.*]

CALLIOPE. Oh, Mis' Toplady. Hold on a minute—

[*She appears in the shed door. She is small, fifty, rosy, alert, with hair fast turning, and she is pushing it from her face with the back of her hand. She is in a reddish-brown calico with a bibbed kitchen apron.*]

Land, Mis' Toplady, how much sugar do you use puttin' up pieplant?

MIS' TOPLADY. You mean just canning it?

CALLIOPE. Yes—for sauce.

MIS' TOPLADY. Why, pound for pound, don't you?

CALLIOPE. That's what I done, but mine acts like the old Harry. I been up all hours getting it made.

MIS' TOPLADY. Getting ready for grandma?

CALLIOPE. Yes; getting ready for grandma. She gets in on the seven forty-five.

UNCLE JIMMY. Where's she coming from?

CALLIOPE. Coming all the way from Idaho, without stopping. Mit-ty [*Rising inflection*], hurry up them cans, short off. [*To* MIS' TOPLADY] I got to sterilize 'em. "Sterilize 'em" sounds so much cleaner'n "wash 'em." [*She reënters the shed.*]

[MIS' TOPLADY *takes up a piece of clothesline and begins stringing it on the porch from post to post.*]

UNCLE JIMMY. Dad gast it!

MIS' TOPLADY. What's the matter, Uncle Jimmy?

UNCLE JIMMY. What's the use of a woman doing all that traveling?

MIS' TOPLADY. Grandma is certainly coming a long ways.

UNCLE JIMMY. Why, they's men that ain't been half that far.

MIS' TOPLADY. Well—men's got work to do. You got yours to do, you know, Uncle Jimmy.

UNCLE JIMMY. Yes, and I'm getting about sick of it. Nothing but wood, wood, wood from morning till night. I'm getting so I spleen the sight of a tree.

MIS' TOPLADY. Well, of course, living is always some of a chore.

[MITTY *appears on the porch of* CALLIOPE'S *house with a basket of Mason jars. She sets it down and reënters the house.*]

UNCLE JIMMY. I'm sick of this town, and I'm sick of running its urrants. They ain't anybody's cat dies that I ain't expected to ring the bell.

MIS' TOPLADY. Why, Friendship Village couldn't get along without you, Uncle Jimmy, and you know it. You're as necessary as the fire engine and a heap quicker.

[*Exit to her house.*]

UNCLE JIMMY. [*Splitting kindling and wagging his head*] Yah—

[MITTY *comes out with more jars.*]

MITTY. Oh, Uncle Jimmy, will you please carry this basket into the shed?

UNCLE JIMMY. [*Obeying*] There it goes—slaving myself away in my tracks.

[*Enter, from the gate,* MIS' POSTMASTER SYKES. *She is distinctly dressed up for morning, with a red waist and a hat with a plume. She is gloved and carries a brown paper bag. She has a way of continually putting her hair behind her ears. She does her best to appear elegant. Throughout she gives* CALLIOPE'S *name the proper accent, though all the rest are content with three syllables.*]

MIS' SYKES. Good-morning, Uncle Jimmy.

UNCLE JIMMY. [*Morosely*] Mornin', Mis' Sykes.

MIS' SYKES. I want you to do something for me.

UNCLE JIMMY. There it is. 'Course you do. I knew it. Even if folks didn't have any urrants beforehand, when they'd lay eyes on me they'd think of one.

MIS' SYKES. Well, this is no ordinary urrant. I'm going to give a party.

UNCLE JIMMY. I s'pose so. Want I should tend door, do ye?

MIS' SYKES. I want you should go around this afternoon and take my invites.

UNCLE JIMMY. Want me to deliver any out in the country?

MIS' SYKES. No. Why?

UNCLE JIMMY. Well, it's coming on spring, and I'd kind of like to get out in the country—or somewhere. Oh, I s'pose I might as well take 'em around.

MIS' SYKES. I've put 'em in a bag to keep 'em clean. Be careful of 'em. Don't dirty 'em with your hands.

UNCLE JIMMY. Yah!

MIS SYKES. [*Impressively*] And, Uncle Jimmy, be sure you take the ones in the bottom of the bag last. I want to call on them this afternoon, and I want to do it before they get their invites.

[*Enter* MIS' TOPLADY *with a tin pan of collars and handkerchiefs which she has washed out.*]

Good-morning, Mis' Toplady. How're you standing it this spring?

MIS' TOPLADY. For the good land sakes alive [*In a great descending scale*] what you doing out so early? [*Hanging up collars, and so on*]

MIS' SYKES. [*With a sigh*] Giving a party.

MIS' TOPLADY. A party? Well, ain't you the social leader?

MIS' SYKES. Nobody knows how I dread it.

MIS' TOPLADY. I've got to wade in an' get some o' my indebtedness paid off while I can have the doors and windows open. Anything I can lend you? Got enough spoons, have you?

MIS' SYKES. Well, I wanted your receipt for boiled frosting.

I tell you what, Mis' Toplady, I guess I'll come in and look over what things you've got and see what I do want.

MIS' TOPLADY. So do. Oh, Uncle Jimmy! I wish't you'd pull this line up some tighter for me, will you? [*Continuing talking with* MIS' SYKES *and hanging up last of the things*]

CALLIOPE. [*At the shed window*] Uncle Jimmy, I wish't you'd bring me a pail o' cistern water, if you will.

UNCLE JIMMY. And gol-darn it, it's *spring!* [*He takes a pail from the shed and goes out under the trellis.*]

[*At the picket gate enters* GRANDMA, *followed by* JOSEF *carrying her bag. She is seventy—small, not stooped, with white hair in little curls about her kindly face. She is wearing a bonnet with lavender flowers, a black dress, an old-fashioned gray silk sack to her knees, and a lavender neckerchief.* JOSEF *is a young Sicilian, good-looking, slow-moving, silent.*]

GRANDMA. Well now! Are they all abed yet? No, young man! Not the front door. You can't go to anybody's front door till after twelve o'clock, noon.

[CALLIOPE *sets a can of pieplant in the shed window and sees* GRANDMA. *She is out of the shed door in a minute.*]

CALLIOPE. Grandma!

GRANDMA. Oh! Caught you before breakfast, didn't I?

CALLIOPE. No. But how on earth did you get here?

GRANDMA. Rode. Come all the way, wide-awake, in the wake-you-up car.

CALLIOPE. Why, I didn't think it was half-past seven. Ladies! Here's Grandma.

[*The two women are already descending the steps.*]

MIS' TOPLADY. Well, for the good land sakes alive!

MIS' SYKES. Well, well, well, well, well! Did you come up all alone?

GRANDMA. Ain't I most old enough to travel alone? Uncle Rod met me though. I left him down town.

CALLIOPE. You was just in time to see Rod, wasn't you? Did he tell you he starts West today?

GRANDMA. Yes, he told me he's going West this morning. He's coming in to see me a minute first.

MIS' TOPLADY. Well, land, land. I s'pose you feel all travel dust and mussed up, don't you, Grandma?

MIS' SYKES. Well, Grandma, I tell you what; it's nice for the neighbors to see company coming and going, though of course we don't have none of the extry work.

CALLIOPE. Come along and make yourself to home. Josef, carry her satchel through to the sitting-room, will you?

[*Exit* JOSEF.]

Well, Grandma! Crossed the city alone, did you?

[*She takes her toward the house, the women following.*]

GRANDMA. Of course. It's my favorite way to cross the city. And I come within one of taking a hack.

THE WOMEN. A hack!

GRANDMA. I never took a hack across the city. So I says to one, "How much is it?" And he says, "Where do you want to go?" And I says, "That depends on how much it is." And he says, "Well that depends on where you want to go to." And I says, "You needn't take me at all." Why if he'd known I was going out of town, no telling how much he'd of charged me!

CALLIOPE. Of course not.

MIS' SYKES. Why, of course.

MIS' TOPLADY. The rascal.

[CALLIOPE *and* GRANDMA *go up the steps, leaving* MIS' TOPLADY *and* MIS' SYKES *together.* UNCLE JIMMY *returns with the water, puts it in the shed, and crosses to* MIS' TOPLADY'S *clothesline.*]

MIS' SYKES. Well, what do you think of that? Calliope with all her burdens on her hands come-on to now with another burden to support.

MIS' TOPLADY. Burden? What do you mean by burden?

MIS' SYKES. I says to Silas this morning, "Of course," I says,

"it's nice to have Grandma coming and all. But it will be a burden on Calliope, say what who will."

MIS' TOPLADY. What you talking, Mis' Sykes? Mentioning burdens. Ain't Grandma independent, I'd like to know?

MIS' SYKES. Independent!

MIS' TOPLADY. Why, of course she is. She's got her three thousand dollars her husband left her; at least it's in property—the Ebbit Mills, out West there. And she's going to pay Calliope her board right straight along.

MIS' SYKES. She's going to pay Calliope her board?

MIS' TOPLADY. That's what she is.

MIS' SYKES. She *is?* Well, I must say I shouldn't think Calliope'd take one cent off her.

MIS' TOPLADY. Why—you just said——

MIS' SYKES. Well, but I never dreamed of Calliope's takin' it. From that old lady! I never heard of such a thing in my born days.

MIS' TOPLADY. Oh, well, it ain't our plate o' bones to gnaw.

[UNCLE JIMMY *comes down* MIS' TOPLADY'S *steps, takes a bit of her flowering currant for his buttonhole, and crosses to the woodpile, humming* "Hey, come along," *and so forth. The women move toward* MIS' TOPLADY'S *house, their heads together.*]

MIS' SYKES. Three thousand dollars! I always thought her husband was one of them investing kind that their families never know where their next roof is coming from.

MIS' TOPLADY. He was. But Grandma was real saving. She was as much superior to him as mince pie is to dried apple.

[*Exeunt to* MIS' TOPLADY'S *house.* JOSEF *comes from* CALLIOPE'S *house and goes toward the gate.*]

MITTY. [*Comes to the door and calls after him.*] Josef! Mind you see to getting her trunk right up here!

JOSEF. [*With a shrug*] Wouldn't you like to go—where all the trunks come from?

MITTY. Oh—yes, sir! Oh, I'd like to go off—to my whole

geography! [*She picks her book from the rail and follows him to the gate, where they stand.*]

[*Enter* GRANDMA *from* CALLIOPE'S *porch. She has taken off her bonnet and is in black, with a soft white scarf about her throat, tied in a bow with long ends.*]

GRANDMA. Well, my soul! If it ain't Uncle Jimmy!

UNCLE JIMMY. Uh?

GRANDMA. Ain't it nice to find you here though!

UNCLE JIMMY. Hello, Grandma! I heard you was coming back.

GRANDMA. Why, Uncle Jimmy, you don't act like you was glad to see me.

UNCLE JIMMY. What did you do it for?

GRANDMA. Do what?

UNCLE JIMMY. Come back to this little two-by-four, half-a-loaf, ten-cent, one-acre town.

GRANDMA. So that's the way you feel about Friendship Village, is it, Jimmy?

UNCLE JIMMY. More. More. I'd say anybody that'd come back here for choice must be wrong some'heres.

GRANDMA. Jimmy, you and I was born here—more years ago than there's any real need of mentioning.

UNCLE JIMMY. That don't make me like it no better.

GRANDMA. And all this time this town has been kind of a home to both of us. If you'd been away as much as I have, you'd be fair body-sick to see the place again.

UNCLE JIMMY. Well, I—ain't never been away.

GRANDMA. It's the dearest place in the world, Jimmy. Land, land! I've laid awake nights trying to remember how many steps went up to different folks's houses and whether they had a door-bell—or you just knocked. I tell you, loving a place you ain't in is like loving a person you ain't with.

UNCLE JIMMY. Yah! Hatin' the town you're in is like hatin' folks you see too much of.

GRANDMA. You don't hate this town!

UNCLE JIMMY. Don't I? There ain't been a minute of the time, day or night, that I ain't been crazy to get out of it.

GRANDMA. Ain't you ever been out of it?

UNCLE JIMMY. Out of it! How old do you think I am? Borderin' on sixty-nine. And do you know I ain't never but once been outside of Wisconsin? Once I went to Chicago—to the World's Fair. I was there three days. And I ain't never crossed the state line before nor since. I donno anybody else my age that ain't been somewhere and seen suthin'. And I'm sick of it. I'm sick o' not goin'.

GRANDMA. Well—that is kind o' funny, your never going, ain't it?

UNCLE JIMMY. Not so gol-darned funny, when it's yourself that ain't been. We had all we could do to get along on the farm when I was a boy. I allus wanted to go then, but I couldn't be spared. Then the war come on, and I tried for that. But they wouldn't take me; I was kind o' spindle-legged them days. Then Father died, and I worked the farm alone till the children got growed and Mother went. Then—I donno. There was always some wood to chop or some water to carry. It allus got away from me. I didn't never get to go.

GRANDMA. Land, land! And I been across the country twice. And I just about et my heart out to get back again.

UNCLE JIMMY. Oh, well, you're a woman.

GRANDMA. Them kind o' things ain't woman, nor man; they're human. Didn't you never try to save up toward it?

UNCLE JIMMY. Yes, but somethin' allus come along and licked it up. I've seen Californy an' the old country just swallowed, heels and head, year after year. My farm went for the mortgage. Late years I—ain't seemed to get ahead any, some way or another.

GRANDMA. Saving goes terrible slow. They ain't nothing slower.

UNCLE JIMMY. Oh, well, I got my funeral expenses saved up. I ain't never comin' onto anybody to bury me. And I've got a nice new alpaca dyin' coat.

GRANDMA. Dyin' coat, Jimmy?

UNCLE JIMMY. Yes; to get laid out in. I thought there wasn't no use gettin' a whole suit, the coffin comes up so high on a person. I guess that'll be wore on my first and last journey. It don't look like I'd ever get anywheres else now.

GRANDMA. Where'd you want to go, Jimmy?

UNCLE JIMMY. Anywheres. I didn't care where, and I wouldn't care now. I'd always thought—I'd always kind of had it in my head I'd like to go where palm trees was growin'. I donno why; I kind of wanted to see 'em growin' in hot lands, big, spiky leaves pointin' into the blue sky like fury. I guess what made me want that is——If I show you somethin', don't you tell.

GRANDMA. I won't, Jimmy.

UNCLE JIMMY. [*Fumbles in his breast pocket, draws out a worn leather wallet, and takes out a yellow, broken letter.*] You remember Rod went to sea when he was a boy?

GRANDMA. Rod? Yes. He was a regular gadabout when it come to oceans.

UNCLE JIMMY. Well, once he wrote me a letter from over there. Here it is. Look at that postmark. I donno's you can make out what it is. Well, it's Bombay, India. Just you feel o' that paper an' think where it's been.

GRANDMA. It's a long way off from Wisconsin, ain't it?

UNCLE JIMMY. Long! Whee-ee! Late years, I've allus kept this in my pocket. When I get sickest o' Friendship Village an' maddest at choppin' wood an' trackin' on urrants I have a look at it. I donno but what you think I'm a darn fool?

GRANDMA. No, I don't. But I wouldn't care if you was.

[CALLIOPE *comes out the side door with a bedroom water pitcher, painted in huge red flowers.*]

CALLIOPE. Mitty! Mitty! Come and fill Grandma's pitcher.

[MITTY *runs from the gate, and takes the pitcher, throwing her geography on the porch. Exit* JOSEF.]

Now your room looks something like, Grandma. I meant to get

my crocheted bedspread and splasher out before you got here. I allus leave 'em in the blue paper till I most hear folks's train whistle. Now I've got to polish off that pieplant. Come in the shed and set, why don't you, Grandma?

[*Exit to shed.*]

GRANDMA. All right, Calliope. Jimmy!

UNCLE JIMMY. What d'ye want?

GRANDMA. Why don't you take whatever you got laid away—and use it—and just go?

UNCLE JIMMY. It's too late—now.

GRANDMA. No, it ain't. It's never too late while you've got breath in your bones.

UNCLE JIMMY. Do you think I could?

GRANDMA. Of course you could. A body can do anything they think they can do.

UNCLE JIMMY. Go off anywheres, my time o' life?

GRANDMA. That's what it is to be alive—to feel you can do a big thing, and go and do it. Why don't you, Jimmy?

UNCLE JIMMY. Well now—by jug, I might. I might make up my mind to—to take a little excursion one o' these days.

GRANDMA. Do it. Go on, Jimmy. It's wonderful cozy to be alive. An' it seems like you ain't sensin' any of it.

[MITTY *appears under trellis with the pitcher. She hears what* UNCLE JIMMY *is saying and comes round to the side to enter house, listening.*]

UNCLE JIMMY. Just you wait! I'll get up and su'prise you all some day an' turn up sendin' you post cards from furrin parts—with buildin's on 'em the shape of ink bottles——

MITTY. Oh, Uncle Jimmy! Will you send me one?

UNCLE JIMMY. Sure I'll send you one—with a castle on one side and a elephant on the other.

GRANDMA. And—a palm tree!

UNCLE JIMMY. You bet, a palm tree! I shouldn't be su'prised but what I'll get a chance to go any day now.

[MITTY *enters house, looking back.*]

[*Enter* UNCLE ROD. *He shouts from the gate.*]

UNCLE ROD. Hi, there! What's the matter with you? Where's all the brass bands and fatted calves and flags and things? Grandma, wasn't they glad to see you? And you a-looking like a posy! [*He strides down. He is round, ruddy, in a linen duster—a prosperous villager, a man of village affairs.*]

GRANDMA. Well, Rod!

CALLIOPE. [*At the shed window*] Hello, Rod! Set down and make yourself to home. I'll be out in a minute.

UNCLE ROD. I just got time to say good-by-git-out. Hello, Jimmy?

UNCLE JIMMY. Hello, Rod! Hev the choppin' block.

GRANDMA. So you're going off just as soon's I get here?

UNCLE ROD. Catching the ten o'clock Through.

UNCLE JIMMY. Where you goin', Rod?

UNCLE ROD. Out West again. Idaho this time.

UNCLE JIMMY. You must of done a lot of trav'lin'.

UNCLE ROD. Oh, I've tracked round consid'ble in my day. This is four times acrost the continint.

UNCLE JIMMY. Four times! . . . Do—do you ride in the sleepin' coach when you travel?

UNCLE ROD. Why, sure!

UNCLE JIMMY. How fur is Idaho?

UNCLE ROD. Oh, I donno. Twenty-six, twenty-seven hundred miles.

UNCLE JIMMY. Whee-ee! . . . There must be palm trees out there.

UNCLE ROD. Palm trees? I donno. Why?

UNCLE JIMMY. Oh, I was just a-wonderin'. . . . It must be an awful nice trip.

UNCLE ROD. Well, I'd rather be shot than go.

UNCLE JIMMY. You don't want to go, Rod?

UNCLE ROD. Want to go? Off out West and set down on the corner of a claim for six months? Can you think of anybody that'd really hanker for that job?

UNCLE JIMMY. Mebbe I can.

GRANDMA. What you going for then?

UNCLE ROD. Well, I took up the fool claim out there for Carrie More's boy. You know him—kind of worthless; but I done it for Carrie's sake. I set on it six months, and he was doing his turn when he took down sick, so's he's just had to go back home. There ain't any use letting a claim like that go to waste, especially when it's for the boy anyway. So I got to go out and squat on it to keep from losing it.

GRANDMA. You've got to go out yourself?

UNCLE ROD. Well, I might give it to somebody if I knew somebody that was fool enough to want to go and would do the square thing by the boy. I've offered it to two or three, but nobody wants to pull up and go. It's a dog-goned nuisance.

GRANDMA. [*With growing intensity*] And you don't want to go, Rod?

UNCLE ROD. I'd rather take a lickin' than go.

GRANDMA. Would it be all right for somebody to go in your place?

UNCLE ROD. Why, sure it would! I'd just lose my interest and transfer the thing to him and he'd squat the full time.

GRANDMA. And you'd stay here, and he'd take the trip?

UNCLE ROD. Thinking of going out yourself, was you, Grandma?

GRANDMA. No. I wasn't thinking of going out myself. But I got somebody else for you that will go.

UNCLE ROD. Who is it?

GRANDMA. Well, he ain't so far from here just this minute.

UNCLE ROD. [*His eyes falling on* UNCLE JIMMY, *who has risen breathless, as the hope has begun to dawn*] Uncle Jimmy! Why, he's just the man.

UNCLE JIMMY. Ye don't mean it!

GRANDMA. Of course you mean it; don't you, Rod?

UNCLE ROD. Mean it? Well, you can bet I mean it. Why, Uncle Jimmy, I never thought of you.

UNCLE JIMMY. No—no; you wouldn't think o' me. Ye—ye couldn't think of me, Rod.

UNCLE ROD. But you're just the one I want, man!

UNCLE JIMMY. Why, I ain't never been just the one anybody wanted—excep' for—[*Vaguely indicates the wood.*] Oh, honest, kin I go?

UNCLE ROD. Go? I'll tell you just when you'll go. You'll go in consider'ble less'n an hour, if you can get ready.

UNCLE JIMMY. Go—go out—in a sleepin' coach?

UNCLE ROD. Yes; yes.

UNCLE JIMMY. And change cars?

UNCLE ROD. Three times before you get to the ranch.

UNCLE JIMMY. And go twenty-seven hundred miles?

UNCLE ROD. Easy! Easy! Now you hustle and get ready.

UNCLE JIMMY. 'Tain't so. Things don't happen so.

GRANDMA. Yes, they do happen so.

UNCLE JIMMY. Not—not to me. It ain't in reason.

UNCLE ROD. The only reason you can't do it, Jimmy, is you can't catch the ten o'clock express. Can you get packed, do you think?

UNCLE JIMMY. Packed? What's that?

UNCLE ROD. Why, your things. Ain't you got any things to take along?

UNCLE JIMMY. I got a couple o' photographs—an' a white collar an' a—a little liniment——

UNCLE ROD. Get 'em; get 'em. Got a satchel?

UNCLE JIMMY. Satchel? I got me one when I went to the World's Fair; but I been usin' it to bring fish home in.

GRANDMA. Oh, Calliope'll have a satchel. Calliope! Calliope! Come out here quick.

CALLIOPE. [*At shed door, wiping a can*] Land, what's the matter? You all look as if you'd turned up the wick.

GRANDMA. Calliope, Uncle Jimmy's going West. Get him a satchel; get him everything. He's going on the ten o'clock express.

CALLIOPE. Going out West? Jimmy is?

UNCLE ROD. He's going for me—providing you womenfolks hustle him ready.

CALLIOPE. If this ain't pourin' peelin's on ashes—or whatever it is they say. Them women! They've got to help. [*She runs to the foot of* MIS' TOPLADY'S *steps.*] Mis' Toplady! Mis' Sykes! Come out here quick.

[*The two women appear at* MIS' TOPLADY'S *door.*]

MIS' TOPLADY. What's the matter?

CALLIOPE. You've got to come out and help get Uncle Jimmy ready. He's goin' West.

MIS' SYKES. Forevermore! Cal-li'o-pe!

MIS' TOPLADY. For the good land sakes alive, Calliope!

UNCLE ROD. I'll tear down to the bank. Mind you have him done when I get back—and you ain't got many minutes to do the whole thing in. Hustle him up.

[*Exit.*]

CALLIOPE. I donno whether I've got a satchel fit to use. Mitty! Mitty!

MITTY. [*From within*] Yes'm. [*Comes running to the door.*]

CALLIOPE. You run up garret and see if the black satchel's there. If it is, you empty the shells out onto the floor and bring it down here.

MITTY. You goin' away, Miss Marsh?

CALLIOPE. No; no. Hurry! Uncle West's goin' East.

MITTY. Goin' East?

CALLIOPE. Yes. Yes. Right off. Don't stand there starin'.

MITTY. Yes'm. No'm. Yes'm. [*Exit* MITTY.]

[UNCLE JIMMY *picks up his ax and starts to work again.*]

CALLIOPE. Look here, Uncle Jimmy, what you doin'?

UNCLE JIMMY. Well, I got to finish this job o' wood.

THE WOMEN. Finish the wood! You got to finish that wood! Well, for pity sakes!

MIS' TOPLADY. You can't finish any job o' wood—not and catch that train.

UNCLE JIMMY. Can't I, Miss Marsh?

CALLIOPE. Well, of course you can't. It'll take every livin' minute you've got to get yourself ready now.

UNCLE JIMMY. But who you goin' to get to do it?

MIS' TOPLADY. Well, don't you go bothering about that. She can get somebody or other to finish it up.

UNCLE JIMMY. 'Tain't everybody that's able to do a good job o' wood and do it shipshape. I—I kind o' feel I'd ought to finish it up. I won't have time to take round invites, will I?

MIS' SYKES. No, I thought of that. But I can get Josef to do it.

UNCLE JIMMY. Josef? Josef! That young whippersnapper? Trust him with invites?

MIS' SYKES. Well, now, don't you worry yourself over them invites.

UNCLE JIMMY. I'm pretty good at takin' round invites. I've studied on it some. 'Tain't everybody 't kin do 'em like they'd ought to be done. Mebbe I could stay over a day?

CALLIOPE. See here! What you talkin' about, stayin' over a day. You go get your clothes together.

GRANDMA. Go get your coat now, Jimmy.

[*He takes down his coat from the door, revealing a long torn sleeve seam.*]

No, not that one—your other one.

UNCLE JIMMY. I ain't got no other one.

GRANDMA. Yes, you have. You told me about it just now.

UNCLE JIMMY. You don't mean—you don't mean I should get my dyin' coat?

THE OTHER WOMEN. Your what?

GRANDMA. I do mean just that. He's got a nice stylish dying coat! We ain't no time to plan for funerals now.

[*Enter* MITTY *with satchel.*]

MITTY. There it is, Miss Marsh.

CALLIOPE. My land, it's rusty. Go get the shoe blacking, Mitty. In the pantry, up by the saleratus. Well, now, there's the satchel. What you got to put in it?

[*Exit* MITTY.]

UNCLE JIMMY. Well, I—I—I don't know about——

CALLIOPE. Go get what you've got.

GRANDMA. Go get your coat, Jimmy.

UNCLE JIMMY. I donno. I don't want—I tell you I don't like—I'd ought to buy some things and see about my lot up to the cemet'ry and—and—take a bath——

CALLIOPE. Oh, now——

MIS' TOPLADY. You go on——

MIS' SYKES. You ain't no time for baths.

CALLIOPE. Hurry!

[*They shepherd him toward the gate. He goes out, rubbing his head, his hat in his hand, his old coat over his arm.*]

MIS' SYKES. Land, Calliope, I can stodge up some neckties and socks for him in a jiffy. I'll run and do it.

MIS' TOPLADY. So do. And I can get him a nice black hat of Timothy's that's too big for him.

CALLIOPE. Ladies, if you find anything for his lunch, bring it along.

MIS' TOPLADY. You trust us!

[*Exeunt,* MIS' SYKES *by the gate,* MIS' TOPLADY *to her house.*]

[*Enter* MITTY *with the blacking.*]

GRANDMA. Let me go in and be spreading his bread and butter.

CALLIOPE. Well, you do that if you will, Grandma.

GRANDMA. Land, I feel as if I was going myself.

[*Exit* GRANDMA.]

CALLIOPE. Mitty, run down cellar for the bread for her. Bring up the whole crock. The nut bread's on the swing shelf. [*Beginning to blacken the satchel*] Mercy, this thing is a sight.

[*Enter* JOSEF *at the gate.*]

JOSEF. That trunk, it did not yet come anywhere.

CALLIOPE. Didn't it? Well, Josef! Have you got time to run up garret and find him a shoe box for his lunch?

MITTY. [*Beckoning from the step*] Oh, Josef, come and help! Old Uncle Jimmy is going away miles and miles and miles.

JOSEF. So he's going where all the trunks go?

MITTY. He's goin' to states I can't begin to bound or name the capitals of.

[*They run into the house.*]

UNCLE ROD. [*At the gate*] All ready, everybody? Is Jimmy ready? Lack o' love, I expected to see him sitting out on the horse block. [*Comes down, watch in hand.*]

CALLIOPE. He's gone for his traps.

UNCLE ROD. Where's Grandma?

CALLIOPE. She's seein' to his lunch.

UNCLE ROD. She is, is she? Looks like Grandma was going to be useful around here, don't it, Calliope? I guess likely her board money'll come in pretty handy, too.

CALLIOPE. Board money?

UNCLE ROD. You ain't had it any too awful all-fired easy. It'll help you out quite a little, won't it?

CALLIOPE. What do you mean?

UNCLE ROD. Why, the money Grandma pays you for her board.

CALLIOPE. Didn't you know, Rod?

UNCLE ROD. Know? Know what?

CALLIOPE. Didn't you know that Grandma ain't got any money?

UNCLE ROD. Why, she ain't got much yet. But I been paying her twelve dollars a month ever since her husband died and charging it up to her property till the mills is sold.

CALLIOPE. I guess you're some out o' pocket, Rod. But then, you can stand it.

UNCLE ROD. Look here. What the dickens are you driving at? Grandma's got about three thousand dollars in the Ebbit Mills.

CALLIOPE. She ain't got a cent in the Ebbit Mills.

UNCLE ROD. She ain't got—what?

CALLIOPE. Sh-h. She don't know. And she never will know from me—nor you either. Her nephew wrote it to me when she was comin' here. They've only just found it out. She ain't got a cent—not a cent. And we ain't ever goin' to tell her.

UNCLE ROD. Her nephew wrote you that, did he? Well, I tell you that's all nonsense. There's some shenanigan about this.

CALLIOPE. Could they be?

UNCLE ROD. Well, I certainly ain't a-going to take any nephew say-so about it.

CALLIOPE. What else can you do?

UNCLE ROD. Why, this just simply changes everything. Do? I'm going out West on the next train and look into this nephew business. No money, eh? We'll see about that.

CALLIOPE. You're goin' West after all?

UNCLE ROD. That's what I'm going to do. I ain't going to leave Grandma's property all loose ends on any such fool understanding as that. I'll go West this morning, just as I intended to.

CALLIOPE. [*Stops blacking the satchel and stares up at him.*] What about Jimmy, Rod?

UNCLE ROD. Thunder, yes! Jimmy. Oh, well, I guess he won't mind.

[MIS' TOPLADY *enters from her house with a hat.*]

MIS' TOPLADY. For the land sakes, the hunt I had for that hat o' Timothy's. He'd tied it up in a paper flour sack. I ain't got the flour all off of it yet. Here's a little stuff I found for Jimmy's lunch.

CALLIOPE. That's good. My land, my head's goin' like a top.

MIS' SYKES. [*At the gate*] Is he gone? [*Coming down*] Here's a tie and some extry socks or so and a handkerchief or two—

[GRANDMA *enters with the lunch box, followed by* MITTY.]

GRANDMA. Veal loaf and nut bread and bake' beans and pickle' peaches and drop sponge cake—

MIS' TOPLADY. Dried beef and cheese and some of my conserve.

MIS' SYKES. And here's a cup o' jell and some of my mustard pickles.

MITTY. And Josef's down cellar for the apples.

[*The women wrap the box in newspaper.*]

Just think o' the maps and maps and *maps* he's goin' acrost!

[UNCLE JIMMY'S *song, sung haltingly, is heard from the street:* "Hey, come along, a Jim along a Josey—" *He comes in at the gate, the "dying coat" over his arm, a little bundle tied in a red bandanna and his bottle of liniment in his hand.*]

UNCLE JIMMY. Well, there's my duds. There's all I got. I'd hate like blazes to have the cork come out o' that pain heal. Hey, gracious, it looks nice here, don't it? All laylocks and crab blossoms. Do—do they—they have laylocks out West, Rod? [*He picks a spray and turns it in his fingers.*]

UNCLE ROD. Jimmy.

UNCLE JIMMY. Eh?

UNCLE ROD. See here, Jimmy. Are you very much set on this trip?

UNCLE JIMMY. Eh—eh?

MIS' SYKES. Set on this trip! Listen to the man.

MIS' TOPLADY. Why, of course he's set on this trip.

GRANDMA. What's the matter, Rod?

UNCLE ROD. I mean, Jimmy, are you really hankering to go West?

UNCLE JIMMY. Why—why——

MIS' TOPLADY. Why, but he's all ready!

GRANDMA. What you talkin', Rod?

UNCLE ROD. Well, it's this way. My plans have changed a little. I find my business is going to be a little different out West than I thought it was. I find I've got to go myself, after all.

UNCLE JIMMY. [*With dimly discernible relief*] You goin'—instead o' me?

GRANDMA. You're goin' to take Jimmy's trip away from him?

MIS' TOPLADY. Well, I think that's a downright shame.

MIS' SYKES. Why, just when he was all on the brink—

MIS' TOPLADY. And his mind all made up for him—

MITTY. An' look a' the lunch.

UNCLE JIMMY. I—I—I could kind o' eat that for supper, though.

[*Enter* JOSEF.]

JOSEF. Here are those apples.

UNCLE JIMMY. I'll—I'll—I'll eat a couple of them now.

GRANDMA. Oh, Rod! This is too bad of you!

UNCLE JIMMY. Well—well—well, now you know I had some things I hadn't done—the wood an'—an' my bath; and then it's spring too, and it's kind o' nice bein' round here and——

MIS' SYKES. Well, I think this is an outrage. Don't you, ladies?

GRANDMA. Rod, I guess we don't understand. That's all. How is it you're going to take Jimmy's trip away from him?

UNCLE ROD. Oh, well, womenfolks—by gum and by jocks, don't take on so about it! I never said I wouldn't take him.

ALL. You didn't?

UNCLE ROD. No. I'll take him along.

ALL. Well, that's something like. Well, I should think so.

CALLIOPE. Well, now I feel like I was right side out again. Of course he's going.

MITTY. Oh, ain't that just gr-a-and?

UNCLE JIMMY. [*Half-heartedly*] You—you goin' to have me go, after all?

UNCLE ROD. Yes; you come along. I shan't stay out there a great while. You stay there afterwards on the claim—just as we fixed it. We'll go out together.

UNCLE JIMMY. But—but—but ——

UNCLE ROD. Come. Get a-going.

[*The women put the lunch into the satchel.* UNCLE ROD *helps* UNCLE JIMMY *on with his coat, which is large for him, and the sleeves very long.* UNCLE ROD *tries to take out the mixed buttonhole, and* UNCLE JIMMY *prevents him.*]

UNCLE JIMMY. Oh, careful! That's an awful good piece of cloth. I ain't never had it on but once, since they took it off the shelf.

THE WOMEN. It looks nice, Uncle Jimmy; real nice!

MIS' TOPLADY. Now take off your hat.

[*He does so and they put on him the hat* MIS' TOPLADY *has brought, which also is too large for him.*]

UNCLE JIMMY. Ain't—ain't it kind of a loose fit?

MIS' SYKES. No; no; it's all right. Now where's his satchel?

UNCLE JIMMY. [*Rescues the old straw hat from them and tucks it under the bench.*] And, Rod, I was goin' to ask you—I ain't been on a train for—for a good many years now. Do—do they go pretty fast?

UNCLE ROD. Fast! Well, I should say so. You'll have the ride of your life crossing the desert.

UNCLE JIMMY. I s'pose I will. The—the Great American Desert, ain't it?

UNCLE ROD. That's the one.

UNCLE JIMMY. I—I've allus heard about that Great American Desert. Uh—Rod, they—they ain't many—not so very many accidents on the trains nowadays, is they?

UNCLE ROD. No. Oh, no. No mor'n common. Now come along.

UNCLE JIMMY. Common?

UNCLE ROD. Come along!

UNCLE JIMMY. I'm a-coming. [*Halts.*] Uh—Grandma, much of any bandits settin' along the track out there, do you remember?

GRANDMA. No; no, Jimmy. Not any to speak of.

UNCLE JIMMY. To speak of?

UNCLE ROD. Now we're off. Get rid of your good-bys quick!

MIS' TOPLADY. Well, good-by, Uncle Jimmy. Don't you get lost.

MIS' SYKES. Nor don't you get smashed up.

CALLIOPE. If you get sick, you just send for me.

GRANDMA. Listen to 'em! He's going to be all right! Good-by, Jimmy. Send me a picture of a palm tree.

UNCLE JIMMY. [*Following* UNCLE ROD] Yes, that's right—a palm tree. There'll be a-plenty; they'll be palm trees—palm trees—

[*He breaks a little branch from the crab-apple tree. He goes out the gate, trying to fasten this in his coat. Exit with* UNCLE ROD. *The others, waving, follow to the gate.*]

MITTY. Oh, ain't it just g-r-rand?

MIS' TOPLADY. [*Wiping her eyes*] Bless his old heart! How he did want to go!

MIS' SYKES. Didn't he, though? [*She picks up her bag of invitations.*]

GRANDMA. Poor Jimmy!

JOSEF. Now I will try that trunk once more. [*To* MITTY] All day long I get their trunks, but my trunk, it don't go.

MITTY. [*Nods, sighs, picks up her geography.*] I ain't done nothing but bound Wisconsin the hull forenoon.

[*Exeunt* MITTY *to shed*, JOSEF *at gate.*]

CALLIOPE. [*Returning last from the gate*] Well, that's over. Now, my land! I got to start myself down-town and get some meat for dinner, or we won't have any. I—don't look very good; I guess I'll have to toilette up a little.

GRANDMA. Calliope, I just would admire to dig us some of these dandelion greens for dinner. Can I?

CALLIOPE. Yes. Dig 'em; dig 'em! I'll get you the pan. Good-by, everybody.

[GRANDMA *goes into house.*]

MIS' TOPLADY. Good-by, Calliope.

MIS' SYKES. Good-by, Calliope.

CALLIOPE. Don't you call me Cal-li'o-pe again, Mis' Sykes. Say Cal'li-ope, like the Lord meant!

MIS' SYKES. Well, I guess it says Cal-li'o-pe in the dictionary.

CALLIOPE. Never you mind the dictionary. They's some words I'd like to pinch out o' the dictionary same as I would a bug. I'm Cal'li-ope, like the circus; and I won't have no "lie" stuck into it.

[*Exit.*]

MIS' SYKES. Well, some folks are awful particular, I must say.

MIS' TOPLADY. Well, I guess Calliope'd ought to know what her own name is!

MIS' SYKES. Of course if there's them that don't want to speak proper nor act proper—

MIS' TOPLADY. Proper? Who's proper, if Calliope Marsh ain't? And speaking o' proper, what you so rigged out for in the morning, I'd like to know? I never see anybody more dressy.

MIS' SYKES. This is for home wear.

MIS' TOPLADY. Mean to say you get a cooked supper in that rig? Fry meat in it, do you?

MIS' SYKES. We don't eat as hearty as some. We don't insist on warm suppers. We feel at our house we have to keep the bills down.

MIS' TOPLADY. For the good land sakes alive! I guess we live as cheap as the best does.

MIS' SYKES. I see you buying shelled nuts, just the same, when shelling 'em with your fingers costs twenty cents off.

MIS' TOPLADY. I never had my store buying criticized before.

MIS' SYKES. [*Near tears*] Nor have I ever, in my twenty-six years of married life *ever* before been called—dressy.

MIS' TOPLADY. Well, never mind, Mis' Sykes—

MIS' SYKES. Well, I'd be polite if I couldn't be pleasant.

MIS' TOPLADY. I'm pleasant enough to pleasant folks.

MIS' SYKES. I would pay some attention to my company manners, no matter what I was in the home.

[*Exit at the gate.*]

MIS' TOPLADY. [*Looks after her a minute over her spectacles.*] Now what do you s'pose we had to go to work and do that for? Ain't folks the funniest things?

[*Exit to her house.* GRANDMA *comes out. She has on a big gingham apron, and in her hands are an old tin pan and a black-handled knife. She goes down to the lawn, crosses toward* MIS' TOPLADY'S, *and begins to dig dandelions. The gate opens, and* UNCLE JIMMY *comes in. He is carrying his satchel and walking with bent head. He comes down to the woodshed and drops his satchel on the bench, and sits on the chopping-block.*]

GRANDMA. Jimmy! [*She rises and goes toward him.*] Why, Jimmy! [*He does not look up, and she comes to him, knife in*

hand. He sits still, his chin sunk on his chest.] Couldn't you do it? . . . Couldn't you go? . . . You've waited too long!

[*He looks up at her with a faint smile. He sits quiet for a moment. Then he rises and pats her elbow. He takes off the "dying coat," folds it neatly and lays it beside his satchel on the bench. He puts the hat with these things. Then he stoops, searches under the bench, pulls out and puts on the old straw hat, picks up his ax and a stick of wood, and brings his ax down with fine vigor on the stick.*]

CURTAIN

THE CLOSET[1]

BY

DORIS F. HALMAN

Doris F. Halman was educated in Boston and graduated from Radcliffe College in 1916. Her *Will o' the Wisp* was produced by Professor George P. Baker in his "47 Workshop" at Harvard College in 1916, and her *Rusted Stock* was presented by the same group in 1917. She has published *The Land Where Lost Things Go*, which received a prize from the Drama League of America, and *It Behooves Us*, plays written in the interest of war sentiment. With a representative volume, *Set the Stage for Eight*, Miss Halman's work has challenged the capacities of ambitious dramatic clubs and amateur organizations in schools and colleges. These short plays are refreshingly imaginative and unusual; their significance is deeper than their literal stories would seem to indicate.

The Closet presents a vivid fantasy of the "skeleton" behind humdrum lives. Its value is twofold, for not only is it an excellent study-play, but its setting, while simple, can be done in the modern expressionistic style, making for the encouragement of originality in production.

[1] Copyright, 1921, by Doris F. Halman. All rights reserved. Applications for the right of performing *The Closet* must be made to The Walter H. Baker Company, 41 Winter Street, Boston, Mass.

CHARACTERS

Rachel Dunn
Sadie
Brenda
Madam Dunn

THE CLOSET

SCENE: *An upstairs corridor, narrow and dim, and cut in the center by a large old-fashioned closet, the double doors to which stand flung back on either side. The corridor boasts no window, and so a narrow flame from a gas jet on the left wall burns for illumination. All the things that habitually hang or lie in the closet are strewn about outside on the corridor floor. There is a lamp with a globular shade, all flowered. A small marble-topped table with a broken leg leans up against the right wall. There is a heap of dresses on the floor, and an old hat in a hatbox.*

[*When the curtain rises,* RACHEL DUNN, *a drab, sallow, tired woman of thirty-five is standing on a chair in the closet, flapping at its empty shelf with a dust cloth. Her hair, save for a few untidy, straight locks, is concealed by a sweeping-cap, and her spare body is wrapped in a long apron. The lamp outside on the floor is being dusted lazily by a brawny young servant girl,* SADIE.]

RACHEL. [*Turning on her chair*] Hurry up with that lamp. I'm ready now.

SADIE. [*Dusting more assiduously*] Yes'm.

RACHEL. [*Reaching out an impatient hand*] Well. . . . Sadie!

SADIE. Gee, Mrs. Dunn, I can't do it no quicker. The shade'll bust on me.

RACHEL. [*Grimly*] It better not. That lamp'll do for a boarder some day.

SADIE. Yes'm. [*She finishes, picks up the lamp, and carries it gingerly into the closet.*] It's a beautiful shade, though cracked. I kinder hoped you'd give it to me for *my* room.

RACHEL. [*Placing the lamp on the shelf*] Then you should have known better. Boarders get everything in this house, all that's fit to use, and most of what isn't; even our time's theirs, so's we have to steal it back for house-cleaning.

SADIE. [*Pleased with the idea.*] Say, ain't we a couple of jail-birds, with them yellin' for us downstairs.

RACHEL. [*Very sharply*] You hurry and bring what's next!

[SADIE *returns to the corridor and scans the objects there.*]

SADIE. This hatbox went on the shelf. . . .

RACHEL. Leave that. It can go in the mission barrel down to church.

SADIE. Yes'm. That's all, for up there.

RACHEL. [*Trying to peer into the corridor*] All? Didn't I have a tennis racket,—the one with the strings loose?

SADIE. Gee, Mrs. Dunn, you threw that away last year.

RACHEL. Yes, I guess I did. I hate old truck around. [*She gets off the chair.*] There's that marble-top with the leg off. I've been at my husband to glue it on, I don't know how long. Then we could use that. You might mention it to him again, when we go downstairs. What's he doing this afternoon? Anything?

SADIE. [*Stating an everyday fact*] Sittin' in the kitchen, with his feet on the stove.

RACHEL. [*Pulling her lips together*] Um. . . . [*She takes up one end of the table.*] Help me lift this in.

SADIE. Yes'm.

[*They carry the old table to the closet and prop it up against the left of the back wall. Its broken leg still lies in the corridor.*]

RACHEL. Dust it.

[SADIE *obeys, and* RACHEL, *going into the corridor, finds the leg. As* SADIE *joins her, she throws it into the closet, and it falls directly under the place where it should stand.*]

SADIE. Now the dresses on the hooks.

RACHEL. It's no sense keeping old cast-offs. What's good can

go to the heathen. [*She kneels down beside the clothing, and rapidly sorts it over.*] That brown wool . . .

SADIE. [*Standing above her*] Want me to take it?

RACHEL. [*Holding it up*] Yes. And this. And this. [*She heaps dresses into* SADIE'S *arms.*]

SADIE. Gee, they don't make cloth so heavy nowadays.

RACHEL. [*Looking up briefly*] I suppose you're glad, you lazy thing.

SADIE. [*Eying her over her burden*] Say, Mrs. Dunn, you're awful cross house-cleanin'.

RACHEL. I'd like to know who wouldn't be. [*She takes a dark-blue taffeta into her hands.*] Now I wonder about this.

SADIE. Handsome, ain't it? You must 'a' looked grand in that.

RACHEL. It wasn't mine. My husband's mother wore it. She died before you came here.

SADIE. Oh. Well, if I'd been your mother-in-law, I'd have got buried in a dress that stiff.

RACHEL. [*Ignoring her*] Taffeta wears so poor. It's all split down the creases. No, I can't give a rag like that to the barrel. [*Running her finger along the folds, she shows long rents. Then she tosses the dress aside, and takes up another.*] Here. Take this green. [*Next, she lifts from the floor a filmy little rose-colored frock.*] And this—no, wait, what's in the pocket? [*She draws out a bit of folded white.*] A baby's bonnet, stamped to embroider. Funny. Must have been something I never finished for Brenda. [*She replaces it in the pocket.*] Speaking of Brenda,—I might make that pink over for her. It's in good shape. [*She throws the rose dress on top of the taffeta, and looks at the two garments remaining.*] Old coats—yes, take those.

[SADIE *staggers under the added weight.*]

SADIE. Gee. Where'll I take 'em to?

RACHEL. [*Getting to her feet*] The kitchen. And tell Mr. Dunn to tie them up for me. And see that he does it before night, there's a mission meeting at eight.

SADIE. [*Going unsteadily out, right*] Yes'm.

RACHEL. [*Calling after her*] And don't let a boarder stop you with those clothes. . . .

SADIE. [*Her voice languishing back*] A-all right. . . .

[RACHEL *stoops and picks up the two dresses and carries them into the closet. The blue taffeta she hangs on a hook at the right of the table. Then she throws the pink dress over the back of the chair, which is still standing in the middle of the closet floor. These things done, she takes a last look round, sees all in order, breathes a long sigh, and, coming out of the closet, shuts the double doors across it. Going along the corridor to the gas jet, she is on the point of turning out the light, when a little girl of ten,* BRENDA, *runs in from the opposite end of the corridor. She is a thin, wistful, small creature, and much excited.*]

BRENDA. Oh, mamma! . . .

RACHEL. [*Turning, impatient*] Brenda? What is it?

BRENDA. [*Respecting the impatient voice*] Nothing much, mamma.

[RACHEL *turns back to the gas jet, and* BRENDA *edges over to the nearer closet door. She has her fingers on the knob, when her mother turns and sees her.*]

RACHEL. What are you doing at that closet?

BRENDA. Opening the door.

RACHEL. What for?

BRENDA. I wanted to look in.

RACHEL. Well, you can't. That closet's just been cleaned. I can't have any dirt dragged into it now.

BRENDA. I wouldn't *go* in, I only wanted to *look* in.

RACHEL. The door's closed, and it's going to stay that way for a year.

BRENDA. Wouldn't you just hold it open a crack, and let me peek round it?

RACHEL. What foolishness have you got into your head now?

BRENDA. Please, mamma.

RACHEL. What do you think you're going to see in there?

BRENDA. [*After a little pause*] A skeleton.

RACHEL. Brenda Dunn!

BRENDA. [*With round eyes*] Is there one, mamma?

RACHEL. Of course there isn't.

BRENDA. Well, you see, mamma, I was over playing at Winnie's house, and her mother had company, and they were talking right there in the room. And all of a sudden, the company said, "My dear, there's a skeleton in *every* closet!" Well, I listened to that, because that's interesting, and what she'd been talking about before wasn't—some man breaking his promise, I think it was. . . .

RACHEL. Well?

BRENDA. So I looked at her, and I said, "We live in a boarding-house; please would we have one there?" And then she laughed and said, "Oh, oh, a different one in every room."

RACHEL. Oh, she did, did she?

BRENDA. So, of course, I can't go into the boarders' rooms and look in their closets, can I mamma? And there isn't any skeleton in mine. The lady said she wasn't surprised to hear it. But I s'posed you wouldn't mind my investigating up here, where you only keep old things. . . .

RACHEL. You're awful backward for ten, Brenda. You hadn't ought to believe such foolishness.

BRENDA. Winnie's mother believed it. She nodded her head and said yes.

RACHEL. She meant something else.

BRENDA. Well, couldn't I just look in?

RACHEL. When people say "a skeleton in the closet," they only mean there's something folks want to hide. Now, Sadie and I have just cleaned this one, and we saw everything in it, and there's nothing we'd hide from anybody.

BRENDA. Except from me. . . .

RACHEL. I won't have you giving in to notions that way. There isn't any skeleton in that closet, Brenda. Nor in any other, here in the house. Now you take my word for it, and run off and play.

[*She goes back to the gas jet and turns it quickly down. The corridor is very dim indeed.*] Such foolishness!

BRENDA. But I think you might. . . .

RACHEL. Brenda! [*The child turns and starts off, right.*]

BRENDA. [*Sighing*] All right, mamma. It's too dark now, anyway. . . .

RACHEL. [*Following*] As if I didn't have enough to do without being disobeyed and made to listen to such nonsense when I'm house cl . . . [*Her voice dies away as they disappear.*]

[*For a moment nothing happens. Then* BRENDA *slips back noiselessly. She tiptoes to the closet, barely visible in the dimness, and waits, listening and looking back. There is no sound anywhere. Convinced that she has not been caught, she opens the closet door a tiny crack. Then she jumps back with a little cry, for a narrow streak of yellow light comes pouring through the crack.*]

BRENDA. [*Softly and scared*] Oh . . . oh. . . .

[*The light persists. She hesitates, gathering up more courage, and finally gives a bold push to the double doors. They swing back on either side, revealing the closet again. Now the lamp on the shelf is sound and whole, and diffusing a comfortable glow of yellow light. The table, also unbroken, stands out from the wall at the left. On the chair beside it sits* RACHEL, *young and pretty at twenty-five, and dressed in the rose-colored frock. She is embroidering the bit of baby finery. Standing at her right, against the wall from which the hooks have disappeared, is an elderly woman,* MADAM DUNN, *tall and stern of aspect, who wears the dark-blue taffeta. It stands out stiffly about her, free from rents. She watches* RACHEL, *who is sewing nervously.* BRENDA, *lost in the corridor's dimness, watches, too.*]

MADAM DUNN. That's the third time you've pricked your finger.

[RACHEL'S *voice comes, no longer weary and dulled, but vibrant.*]

RACHEL. Yes, I—I know how many times it is.

MADAM DUNN. You shouldn't get all worked up, thinking about old things.

RACHEL. [*Turning to her*] It's new things I'm worked up about. . . .

MADAM DUNN. New things?

RACHEL. [*Looking down at her work again*] Yes.

MADAM DUNN. [*Stirred from her immobility*] Have the people in this town found out?

RACHEL. About—him?

MADAM DUNN. Are you afraid to mention your husband's name?

RACHEL. [*Low*] It isn't fear, exactly.

MADAM DUNN. Do they know what he—did, and where he really is?

RACHEL. No. I don't think so. They were asking me only last night how long his firm would keep him abroad.

MADAM DUNN. Where was that?

RACHEL. At the dance for the High School Fund. . . .

MADAM DUNN. [*With a sort of shocked horror*] You went to a dance now. . . .

RACHEL. Yes. I met . . . [*Her voice changes slightly.*] . . . I met the doctor, and he urged me, just for a few minutes.

MADAM DUNN. You're always meeting him, and having him urge you somewhere.

RACHEL. I think he's kept me sane, making me ride with him, and play tennis, and get out among people.

MADAM DUNN. [*With a curious inflection*] Out among people. . .

RACHEL. [*Wincing*] Oh, I know—who can't. [*She turns, pleading.*] But last night—I knew you were here with baby, and I didn't see the harm. . . . Oh, I've been so wretched, I thought it might help. But all the time I danced, I thought about—what—*he* was doing.

MADAM DUNN. What did you say to them about him?

RACHEL. I said—three years. That's the rest of the time—isn't it?

MADAM DUNN. Yes, yes.

RACHEL. And *they* said baby'd be quite a girl when her father saw her again!

MADAM DUNN. Well,—so she will. . . .

RACHEL. [*Low*] *If* he sees her again.

MADAM DUNN. What do you mean by that?

[RACHEL *thrusts the embroidery into her pocket, and goes over to the older woman.*]

RACHEL. Mother. . . . [*The word, for a moment, halts her.*] I mean I . . . I want to get a divorce from him.

MADAM DUNN. You want . . .

RACHEL. A wife can, you know, when a man's in prison.

MADAM DUNN. But you'd have to say that. . . .

RACHEL. Yes. Of course!

MADAM DUNN. And then people would know. I want to die where they don't know about it.

RACHEL. But I couldn't get one any other way.

MADAM DUNN. [*After a pause*] Don't you—love him at all?

RACHEL. No.

[MADAM DUNN *comes down and sits in the chair.*] It's hard to say that to you—you're his mother.

MADAM DUNN. And you're his wife. You ought to stand by him now.

RACHEL. Oh, why ought I? If I loved him, that would be different. But I don't. You know how it was between us. He—he rushed me into marrying him. And I'd found out my mistake—even before baby came.

MADAM DUNN. [*With a stern wistfulness*] I wish I could defend him.

RACHEL. But you don't. Oh, what liking I had left for him, that forgery destroyed. That forgery that came just after baby was born—think of it! Could I like him?

MADAM DUNN. For better, for worse—for worse, also, . . .

RACHEL. I don't see why.

MADAM DUNN. That's your promise.

RACHEL. When the three years were up, I should dread his coming home.

MADAM DUNN. You'd get over that.

RACHEL. And he'd want to touch baby.

MADAM DUNN. Well, he's her father. . . .

RACHEL. [*Turning away*] Yes.

MADAM DUNN. And what's to become of her, with you divorced?

RACHEL. The doctor—wants to marry me.

MADAM DUNN. [*Slowly*] Oh! . . . That's it.

RACHEL. He wants to. And I want him to. *He*—does love me. He's willing to take baby. He'll adopt her, and she'll grow up with a good name, and never know the difference.

MADAM DUNN. She'd find out.

RACHEL. No, we'd go away again somewhere. He could practise in some other place; he's young, and he's been left well to do. I'd send you money, so you'd never need to take boarders, like now. . . .

MADAM DUNN. So that doctor—*knows*.

RACHEL. Not about *him*—not yet. Only that there's no love lost between husband and wife. He told me last night that he'd suspected that from the first time we called him to see baby. But when he knows the rest,—he won't mind. He's a *man*, a real man. . .

[MADAM DUNN *buries her face in her hands.*]

Oh, I didn't mean to say that!

MADAM DUNN. [*Still with bowed head*] It's all right.

RACHEL. He's coming here today—and then I'll tell him. I can't keep anything from him, because he loves me so much. I've never been loved his way before. It's wonderful, even in misery.

MADAM DUNN. [*Looking up at her*] You talk like a girl.

RACHEL. Sometimes, I almost feel like a girl again. Don't you

see—I've a chance to begin all over. It's not too late. Instead of this—this torment, all the time—I can be happy, just like other women—with my man. And baby. She's such a little tiny thing now. It's quite as if she hadn't lived through this. She can grow up like other children. Happy and well provided for. We'd both be so happy, baby and I.

MADAM DUNN. And I?

[RACHEL *looks at her.*]

What would that do to me?

RACHEL. [*Hesitant*] Would you come with us—at least, for these three years?

MADAM DUNN. It's not likely I would.

RACHEL. Oh. . . . I suppose it *is* selfish, to leave you alone in the wreck.

MADAM DUNN. Selfish? After all our plans, for you to bring shame down on us?

RACHEL. It's not my shame!

MADAM DUNN. But we can hide it,—just as we have right along.

RACHEL. There was no hope for me then.

MADAM DUNN. [*Faltering*] I thought—I thought God directed us to this town, where no one ever heard of us before. But that young doctor had to be here, too. In this one place, of all the towns in the world.

RACHEL. He'll make it easier for *you.*

MADAM DUNN. Do you call it easy, taking charity? No; and boarders will never come, once they have found out.

RACHEL. Don't make it so hard.

MADAM DUNN. If you ever intended to go back on my son and me, why did you let me come? Why did you let me pack up everything I had, and say good-by to all my friends, who, after all, did pity me? Why did you let me, poor and old and tired as I am, go to all that wrenching and work, so you could leave me, bowing my head among strangers?

RACHEL. I didn't know. . . .

MADAM DUNN. Because you know now, does that make any difference?

RACHEL. Oh . . . you—think—think what you'd do in my place.

MADAM DUNN. I wouldn't bring shame on my baby, and myself, and an old woman.

RACHEL. I don't feel that way. I'd be throwing the shame off, once for all. And, oh, I've got so *long* to live!

MADAM DUNN. [*The stoic in her breaking*] And I've got too long. I wish to God I could die.

RACHEL. You—why, you've always been so strong-minded, so brave. . . .

MADAM DUNN. There's limits when people suffer.

RACHEL. Mother. . . .

MADAM DUNN. [*Drawing away from her*] Don't you mother me.

RACHEL. I . . .

MADAM DUNN. I've only got one child, and he's in prison. He can't get to me, and I'm all at the mercy of strangers. . . .

RACHEL. Don't talk that way. . . .

MADAM DUNN. I fought as hard as I could, but I'm old, and somehow I can't stop things from going wrong. . . .

RACHEL. [*Coming to kneel by her side, pleading*] Please—please. . . .

[MADAM DUNN *gets up from her chair, leaving* RACHEL *kneeling beside it, and walks unsteadily upstage right, where suddenly she collapses, sobbing, against the wall.*]

MADAM DUNN. I can't save my own son—and the baby—and all of us from disgrace. . . . I can't do anything. . . . I can't even die . . . die, oh, God, *please*. . . .

[*She sobs, the terrible sobs of an old woman.* RACHEL, *shivering, pulls herself up from the floor, till she is sitting in the chair again. Somewhere a bell rings.* RACHEL *listens.* MADAM DUNN *grows more quiet.*]

RACHEL. [*In a queer, choked voice*] That's the—doctor.

MADAM DUNN. [*Fighting for control*] Maybe—'tis.

[*A pause. The bell, a faint sound, rings again.*]

RACHEL. [*At last*] If you'll—let him in—I'll tell him—he can't have me . . . ever. . . .

[*The bell rings a third time. Both women are listening, both placed exactly where they were when* BRENDA *opened the closet door. At this moment there comes a loud voice from the corridor.*]

SADIE. [*Voice, off right*] Brenda! Brenda! . . .

[BRENDA, *hearing it, runs and closes the double doors. The corridor is dim and still when* SADIE *enters.*]

BRENDA. Here I am, Sadie.

SADIE. [*Advancing on her*] Well, it's a good thing. Your ma's just let in the doctor, Mis' Bartlett on the second floor's took sick. You'll be needed to get medicine from the drug store. Besides, I want some kindlin' for the stove. Your dad's too comfortable to get it, and I'm too busy.

BRENDA. [*Starting past her*] I'll do both.

SADIE. [*Stopping her with a large hand*] Say, you been in that closet?

BRENDA. No!—Oh, no, Sadie!

SADIE. Honest?

BRENDA. Cross my heart.

SADIE. Your mother wanted to know. [*She starts to open the doors.*]

BRENDA. Oh!—You'd better not go in!

SADIE. [*Stopping*] Why not?

BRENDA. There's somebody there. . . .

SADIE. [*With much suspicion*] Huh!—Who?

BRENDA. They didn't say their names, and I don't think I ever saw them before.

SADIE. Why didn't you ask?

BRENDA. They were too busy. If you'd seen them, you wouldn't have, either.

SADIE. If I had, I'd be runnin' yet. [*Hands on hips, enjoying herself, she surveys* BRENDA.] And what are they doing in your mother's closet?

BRENDA. [*Reflecting*] Well, they seemed to be feeling badly. But I couldn't make out just why.

SADIE. [*Her grin broadening*] Betcher couldn't.

BRENDA. They were expecting the doctor, too.

SADIE. [*Tapping her forehead*] And you're the one that needs him the most! . . . [*She flings the doors wide. It is pretty dark inside, but one can see that the closet is as* RACHEL, *house-cleaning, left it.* SADIE *goes in and peers about. Returning to the corridor she speaks impressively, pointing backward with her thumb.*] Well, it's a good thing for you that nothing happened there! C'mon now, you got to work. . . .

CURTAIN

THE KILLER[1]

BY

ALBERT COWLES

Albert Cowles is from Pennsylvania and went to The University of Pennsylvania. His versatility in the practical affairs of the stage is unusual. He knows the theater as manager, actor, and dramatist; he has been general director for motion-picture producers at Hollywood, and he has conducted a school of acting, but his special inclination is toward playwriting. He is the author of about twenty pieces for the theater. *Under Orders*, his war play, scored a notable success.

The traditions of the Northwest Mounted Police of Canada, whose slogan is "He got his man," and the atmosphere of the deep woods at Christmas pervade *The Killer*. It was first produced by a notable professional cast, under the direction of William Faversham, who played the leading rôle, and it had great favor with theater-goers. It ran for four years in America. In a comedy or a tragedy the dramatist wishes to portray real life convincingly, but in *The Killer* plausibility has been intentionally sacrificed to produce surprise, suspense, laughter, thrills. Such a play is melodrama.

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CHARACTERS

THE KILLER, *who has seven (?) "notches" on his gun*
THE SHERIFF, *who is after the* KILLER
THE GIRL, *who is in love with the* KILLER
THE OTHER MAN, *who is in love with the girl*

THE KILLER

TIME: *About sunset, Christmas Eve.*

PLACE: *Canadian woods.*

SCENE: *A deserted log cabin—a window up right of center with the glass out; a piece of burlap to keep out the snow half covers it. Up center, left of the window, is a door which opens on stage. Down right is an old fireplace, a partly burned log in it. Left is a door, open on stage, and on a rough table up right of center is a Christmas tree, partly trimmed and covered by an old horse blanket. A rambly table is at center; one broken chair and an empty dry-goods box. There is no other furniture in the room. There are two empty bottles with burned candles in them.*

[*At rise of curtain, sunset glow is seen through window of cabin C. The voices of two men are heard outside, then two men appear at the C. door opening. The* KILLER, *carrying many packages slung over his shoulders, enters, followed by the* SHERIFF. *The* SHERIFF'S *hands are held together in front of him by a pair of handcuffs. The* KILLER *deposits his bundles etc. on the table C., then turns to the* SHERIFF.]

KILLER. Here we are, Sheriff! you must be plumb tired after your thirty-mile ride, so make yourself at home. You're welcome, you know—even if you are a—*sheriff.*

SHERIFF. Now this has gone far enough. In the name of the law I order you to unlock these handcuffs.

KILLER. But Sheriff, they belong to you; why shouldn't you wear them? Besides, you tried to put them on me last night, didn't you?

SHERIFF. Of course I did, but you're a criminal with a price on your head. I am an officer of the law.

KILLER. Well, I wouldn't brag about that, Sheriff, 'cause *regular* officers of the law ain't wearing handcuffs this season—they ain't fashionable!

SHERIFF. Oh, you can joke if you like, but when I'm missed back in Winnipeg, the Northwest mounted boys will be put on your trail and *they'll* get you.

KILLER. And what do you suppose Winnipeg thinks has happened to their prize little deputy sheriff?

SHERIFF. They'll think you've done for me as you did for the others; you claim to have six killings to your credit, don't you?

KILLER. No, Sheriff—*seven*—there's a couple of you manhunters I don't think they've found yet. Oh, I suppose I should have finished you and come on by myself, but tomorrow is Christmas, Sheriff, and doggone me, I do hate to be alone on Christmas, so I brought you along as my *guest*, hoping you would be sensible, and sorter enter into the spirit of the festivities, 'cause if you do, we can have a right merry time, Christmas tree, eats, and everything! [*Pointing to partly trimmed tree up stage*] You see I have the *makings* of a tree already!

SHERIFF. I get you. The Sheriff of Winnipeg is to be the guest of the notorious *Killer* during the Christmas festivities.

KILLER. That's it, Sheriff—by special request.

SHERIFF. And do you always keep your guests handcuffed?

KILLER. I guess I can turn you loose now—we're thirty miles off the trail, and when you get ready to turn in I can *hobble* you again.

SHERIFF. Thanks.

KILLER. But I guess I'll just remove this *artillery* of yours. [*He takes two guns from the* SHERIFF *and lays them on the table.*] You fellows sure have a fondness for shooting irons. I wonder some of you don't tote a machine gun—they shoot faster. [*He removes the* SHERIFF'S *handcuffs, throws them on the table, then shoves a grocery box toward him.*] Have a rocker, Sheriff.

SHERIFF. Thanks. Even this is better than riding double—and do your guests ever eat?

KILLER. Eat? Why, Sheriff, I've got some eats buried near here that just make my mouth water to think of them, and just as soon as I undo some of these Kriss Kringle packages—I wonder, Sheriff, if you could sorter help on the trimmin' of this tree—of course I've got the general idea of it but—

SHERIFF. God bless my soul! what a headline for the papers! "Sheriff Hammond of Winnipeg spent Christmas Eve with the notorious criminal known as the Killer, and assisted him to trim a Christmas tree,"—that sure would read good.

KILLER. Well, you know that *poem*, Sheriff, about "All work and no play." [*During the conversation the* KILLER *has been unwrapping several packages. He now holds up a large doll baby—one whose eyes open and close.*] That sure is a pretty dolly. That ought to make almost anyone open their eyes.

SHERIFF. Well, if you expect me to go into raptures over a doll baby—

KILLER. But Sheriff, this ain't for you—it's for someone else—Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun if it don't open and close its eyes! Sheriff, that's going to tickle her near to death. So it's going to have the best spot on the tree!

[*The* KILLER *turns and walks up toward the tree, looking for a place to hang the doll. As he does so the* SHERIFF *sneaks to the table, grabs one of the guns. Just as he draws back the trigger the* KILLER *quickly faces him, and the* SHERIFF *finds himself looking into the* KILLER'S *gun. So quickly has the* KILLER *drawn that the* SHERIFF'S *gun is not in a position to fire.* SHERIFF *drops gun on table, half raises his hands.*]

SHERIFF. Now don't shoot—don't!

KILLER. You rat! A minute more and I'd have got it in the back, eh? I've a notion to forget it's Christmas—and finish you—

SHERIFF. Now, please—remember—I'm your *guest!*

KILLER. And a hell of a guest you are! Here I am trimming a tree to make you happy and in the goodness of my heart treating you—just a common Deputy Sheriff—as my holiday guest—and

all you think of is how you can drill me and collect that $5000 reward.

SHERIFF. And why shouldn't I if I could—that's my business—catching criminals.

KILLER. And killing sheriffs is mine—according to all reports—but I'd like to have just one peaceful Christmas without any killings, sorter of a holiday till the first of the year. But I suppose I'll have to forget it's Christmas time—want to pray a minute?

SHERIFF. Don't—I won't try it again—on my word of honor—

KILLER. And you'll sorter—help with the festivities?

SHERIFF. Well—yes—but how long are you going to keep me here?

KILLER. Sheriff, there's something that I'm wantin' and wantin' mighty bad—and if I *get it*, say tomorrow, as a Christmas present, I'm going to turn you loose—and if you're a good little sheriff, I may let you take the Killer back with you and collect that $5000.

SHERIFF. You mean—you'll surrender—to me?

KILLER. I mean just what I said—that I may let you take the Killer back with you—so, is it a truce for twenty-four hours?

SHERIFF. For twenty-four hours.

[*They shake hands, the* KILLER *replaces his gun, then takes the* SHERIFF'S *gun from the table and hands it to him butt end first. Then he folds his arms and waits. The* SHERIFF *holds the gun pointing at the* KILLER *for a moment, then lays the gun on the table; then, by an action of the hands, he conveys that he doesn't want anything to do with it.*]

KILLER. I'm glad you didn't try it, Sheriff, for last night, when you were sleeping—I unloaded those—*siege guns.*

SHERIFF. *I'm* keeping my word.

KILLER. Sometimes that's pretty hard to do. [*He takes his revolver from his holster and opens chamber to show that it is loaded.*] This one *is* loaded. [*He closes gun and hands it to* SHERIFF *as he did the other one.* SHERIFF *takes gun, then hesitates.*] Five thousand buys a lot of things, Sheriff!

SHERIFF. But I don't think it buys—honor. [*He bows and hands gun back to the* KILLER, *who smiles.*] No thanks—I'm keeping my word—and tomorrow I'm expecting you to keep yours—and surrender.

KILLER. I got you, Sheriff. [*He takes belt and holster off, walks up to the window C., hangs it on a nail by the window, which is behind a piece of burlap that is used to cover up the window.*] In case you change your mind—it's here—behind this burlap.

SHERIFF. Thanks, I'm too old to take chances.

KILLER. Good. Now, let's try our hand at draping this tree, shall we? [*He picks up tinsel cord etc.*] This sure is easy to look at—hang it where we'll get the biggest flash, Sheriff.

SHERIFF. You seem right serious about this Christmas-tree stuff; somehow or other it just makes me want to laugh.

KILLER. [*He looks up suddenly as if the idea to laugh had just occurred to him.*] *Laugh!*—that's it, you said it, Sheriff, *laugh!* That's just what Christmas is doing to me—it makes me want to laugh and be happy—and make other people happy. I suppose killing sheriffs is all right—it's good sport—but it's good to laugh too—once in a while. [*He holds up strings of red pop corn.*] Well, doggone me! I'm going to learn where this red pop corn grows!

SHERIFF. But this killing of men—*seven* you say you've killed?

KILLER. Well, it's kind of hard to remember them all, Sheriff; let's see—[*He thinks, and counts them on the ends of his fingers.*] One—two—four—five—six—seven—oh, yes! No, Sheriff, it's *eight*! I'd forgotten that funny little sheriff from Ottawa; he made eight!

SHERIFF. Eight! My Soul! [*Half to himself, as the* KILLER *interests himself in some new toys*] And don't you regret it—I mean—the thoughts of those—dead men, don't they keep you awake nights?

KILLER. Bless your little heart, no, Sheriff. Of course now and then I sorter feel sorry for them, especially at Christmas time like this, when everybody should be happy and gay. But somehow or other I never regarded the killing of a sheriff the same as I would a

regular man. [SHERIFF *squirms. The* KILLER *hands him two toy angels with wings.*] These angels ought to fill up that empty spot there! Pretty, aren't they?

SHERIFF. Yes, they are.

KILLER. I don't s'pose sheriffs ever *do* get to be *angels.*

SHERIFF. [*As he turns to go up stage and hang up angels, he puts hand to his head.*] Eight!

KILLER. You see I've got the lights already on—electric ones too—and batteries to run 'em with—worked two whole nights on them. I say, Sheriff, you like wild turkey, don't you, with cranberries, mince pie, and cheese?

SHERIFF. Do I! We don't get wild turkeys in the city.

KILLER. I got plenty, *killed* them myself. [*He unwraps a lot of cotton that has been sprinkled with silver dust and takes it up to the* SHERIFF.] Now for the snow, Sheriff. Don't that give it a Christmasy look?

SHERIFF. It sure does. You know this is a lot more fun than I thought it would be!

KILLER. Let's put this jumping jack up there. Gosh, this Red Cross nurse is going to look very lonely up there by herself; we really should have a wounded sheriff *hanging* near her!

SHERIFF. You suppose we could sorter forget those—sheriffs, for a few minutes?

KILLER. Sure. I don't like to think of them myself—right now—more snow?

SHERIFF. Yep, a little right here—there, how's that? Can't you just hear the sleigh bells, and see old Santa Claus driving the reindeer?

KILLER. I'll say you can, but wait till the candles are lighted!

SHERIFF. By golly, it reminds me of old times.

KILLER. You know, Sheriff, somehow or other, when I see you so happy, I can't help wishing that some of those dead sheriffs were here to enjoy this, too. Here we are having a good time, getting ready for a right merry Christmas——

SHERIFF. Anything else go on the tree?

KILLER. That's all at present, and now for the big surprise!

[*He puts arm on the* SHERIFF'S *shoulder, leads him down to the table, takes small box from his pocket, unwraps it, and takes out a small gold ring. The* SHERIFF *takes box and looks closely at ring.*]

SHERIFF. A ring!

KILLER. Eighteen carats—solid gold too.

SHERIFF. Engagement ring, isn't it? Who's it for—not me!

KILLER. Sheriff, if I could tell you who she is—I mean if I could describe that girl to you—and do it in fittin' language—you'd just say I was a poet or something. [*He puts ring back in his pocket.*]

SHERIFF. But you can try ——

KILLER. I know, but I always hate to do a thing and not do it right. Why, even with those poor sheriffs, I never left one of the wounded to die all by himself—no, sir, not me. I always finished my job then and there.

SHERIFF. Ahem—yes—the girl, she must be pretty?

KILLER. Pretty? Sheriff, did you ever see a glorious pink and red rosebud just ready to burst into bloom? A rose with each of its petals a more delicate color than the others? See it as it swayed on its slender stem as if tryin' to shake off the drops of dew as they sparkled like diamonds in the morning sun? Ever see a rose like that?

SHERIFF. I—think so.

KILLER. Well, that's just what she's like—a glorious pink and red rose.

SHERIFF. And you've asked her to marry you?

KILLER. I'll say I have!

SHERIFF. And she's going to?

KILLER. She's to let me know tonight. You see her answer is to be a sort of—a—Christmas present.

SHERIFF. Tonight? Here?

KILLER. Yep.

SHERIFF. So that explains the tree——

[*Lights are gradually fading from sunset to moonlight.*]

KILLER. It explains everything there is to explain, Sheriff,—the tree, the toys, and this wonderful Christmas feeling. And what a present it will be. You think she'll say yes, don't you? You do, don't you, Sheriff?

SHERIFF. Of course I hope so—friend.

KILLER. If she doesn't, Sheriff, God help me, and God help those who have hunted me night and day for years, kept me away from civilization, away from her, and the chance to prove to her that I am the man she'd have me be. If she says no—God help those man-hunters!

SHERIFF. You mean—the sheriffs?

KILLER. Yes—the sheriffs.

SHERIFF. [*As he mentally sees himself riddled with the* KILLER'S *bullets*] I certainly hope she accepts you!

KILLER. And she will, Sheriff,—she must—you'll see! But in case she doesn't—you'll say a good word for me? You'll forget what you know about me and try to persuade her, won't you?

SHERIFF. Believe me, if there is anything I can say that will help—her answer will sure be yes!

KILLER. That's fine, Sheriff, and I won't forget it. It's getting dark, so let's light up—so it'll look cheerful and Christmasy when she gets here. Then we'll go and get the eats—and wait for her—and we'll be hoping too—won't we, Sheriff?

SHERIFF. I'm hoping good and plenty right *now!*

KILLER. [*Handing the* SHERIFF *two bottles with candles stuck in their necks*] You light these. I'll see to the candles on the tree — [*As he lights up the tree*] You think this is going to please her, Sheriff?

SHERIFF. God knows, I hope so!

KILLER. It sure does look festive and Christmasy-like. Now, we'll leave the door wide open, and this candle at the window for her to see, and we'll go out and get the grub. You see I can't keep it here, because I don't *live* here, I only *hide* here, trying to dodge those damn *sheriffs*.

SHERIFF. You know, I'm not only hoping she says yes, *I'm praying!*

[*The* KILLER *and the* SHERIFF *exit. There is a pause, then at the rear window appears the* GIRL. *She sees the tree and clasps her hands in delight, leaves the window and enters through the door. The* GIRL *is dressed in her Sunday best, with a bunch of holly in her hair and at her waist; she carries small basket. She puts basket on the table and again looks at tree.*]

GIRL. Oh—oh—a real Christmas tree—oh! [*She sees the doll, picks it up and hugs it to her breast. Looks at the other toys on the tree, then takes from her basket bits of draperies, colored paper, bunches of holly, etc., and places them about the room. As she does so the face of the* OTHER MAN *appears at the window. He makes sure that no one else is with her, then he enters at the door. The* GIRL *dances his way; she sees him, gives a frightened cry, and backs over to the table C.*] You—you followed me——

MAN. So this is why you wouldn't see me tonight, is it? You came here instead to meet him,—came to the Christmas party!

GIRL. And haven't I the right to meet him if I want to? Do I have to ask you where I am to go and whom I am to meet?

MAN. You may think you don't but you do. I told you I was going to marry you and I meant it—I also told you that no other man should have you and I meant that too!

GIRL. I've known you only a month. I don't know who you are or where you come from, and I don't love you, so why should I marry you?

MAN. Oh, and this man, how long have you known him?

GIRL. Just about as long—but—I do love him, and he loves me!

MAN. Then you don't know where he comes from or what he's doing here either.

GIRL. I don't care about that—I love him.

MAN. Then I'll tell you who he is—you see this —— [*Pointing to an old reward sign that is pasted on the wall*] It says: "$5000 reward is offered for the capture, *dead or alive*, of Peter Haig,

better known as The Killer." Well, this man, the man you say you love, is Peter Haig, the outlaw, the Killer!

GIRL. I don't believe it.

MAN. Then why is he hiding away in this deserted cabin, never seeing anyone except you—always flush with cash, and always armed? I've known from the first that he was the Killer.

GIRL. No matter what you say, I don't believe you.

MAN. Five thousand dollars is offered for him dead or alive—and I'm going to collect that reward tonight!

GIRL. You mean—you will——

MAN. He'll come back to see you, and when he does—[MAN *draws gun.*] I'll get him!

GIRL. No, no, you wouldn't—you daren't—besides he's not that man—I know it—I feel it!

MAN. I swear to you that I'll get him tonight—unless you——

GIRL. Unless—what?

MAN. Unless you agree to do what I tell you. If you do I'll forget the reward and give you a chance to save his life.

GIRL. How?

MAN. When he comes back you will see him here alone, and you will tell him that you made a mistake—that you don't love him—and that you do love me.

GIRL. I won't—I won't——

MAN. You will—you will also tell him that you are going to marry me tomorrow—that we are going away together—and that you never want to see him again.

GIRL. I tell you I won't! I don't love you, and I do love him!

MAN. I'll be there in the next room with this. [*He shows gun.*] And if you don't tell him just what I've said, or try to betray me—I'll kill him. I'll get rid of him, and at the same time get the $5000. Now, it's up to you!

GIRL. I can't do it, I tell you—I won't——

MAN. [*He hears noise of the* KILLER'S *approach, runs to window, sees the* KILLER *coming, then back to the* GIRL.] He's

coming. I'll be in there—listening, and remember—*his life is in your hands!*

[*He exits into the side door of the room. This door opens on and down stage so that in following scenes the* MAN *can be seen through partly open door, while the other characters are on the stage.* GIRL *stands dazed, then the* KILLER *is heard whistling, and he passes the window and enters the door carrying a pair of wild turkeys thrown over his shoulder, and other things for the Christmas dinner in his hands. The* GIRL *has taken a position somewhere near and, if possible, under the Christmas tree, so that when the* KILLER *sees her she is to him a part of the Christmas picture.*]

KILLER. Is it you——

GIRL. Hello——

KILLER. You're not one of those angels from off the tree up there, are you?

GIRL. No, Tom, no——

KILLER. [*He puts things near table, goes to her, and takes both hands in his.*] It's really you—I can't believe it yet. You see you looked so pretty as you stood there under the tree that I thought one of those make-believe angels had come to life—the tree—our tree—you like it?

[SHERIFF *appears in doorway, arms full of things; stops, sees the* KILLER *and the* GIRL *together, then backs out again. A moment later we see him at the window, so we know that he is listening.*]

GIRL. It's beautiful—and you fixed all this—a real Christmas tree—just for me? It's all too wonderful! You see I tried to help a little, too—[*She points to things she brought and placed around the room.*]

KILLER. Then you were thinking too of Christmas—our Christmas? And don't it just look real and Christmasy-like? And it makes me *feel* that way, too, glad I'm alive!—but the best of all—we're here together—just you and me—that's even more

wonderful—come, sit here, right near the tree, just under the *other* angels!

[*The* GIRL *looks toward door where* MAN'S *face can be seen watching them.* MAN *motions with gun as if to warn her to obey orders.*]

GIRL. But, Tom—I must tell you——

KILLER. [*He forces her to sit near the tree, then he stands back and looks at her.*] Yes, that's it—that's just the way I've dreamed of seeing you—right there under the tree—with all the lights, the toys, and the make-believe snow. That's just the way I dreamed it would be.

GIRL. You must listen—I must tell you——

KILLER. But it all seemed too wonderful to ever come true!

GIRL. Your answer, Tom, that I promised you tonight——

KILLER. And while cutting that tree 'way back there in the woods, my ax, as it whacked away, just seemed to sing, "And she'll be there to see it—she'll be there with you!"—and girl, girl, it's all come true!

GIRL. Don't—Tom—don't——

KILLER. And on the way to town for the toys I kept seein' it all as I see it now,—the tree, the lights, the Christmas look of things, and standing near I could see you—just as I see you now. So, Merry Christmas, dear, to you—a Merry Christmas—to my love!

[*He takes her hands and kisses them. As he does so side door is opened slightly.* MAN *again warns her by aiming his gun at the* KILLER. *The* GIRL *stops him by a motion of the hand, rising as she does so.*]

GIRL. You mustn't, Tom—you mustn't——

[*She rises and crosses to table C., sits, lets her head fall on her arms, and cries. The* KILLER *goes toward her.*]

KILLER. Why, girl, what is it? [*She does not answer. The* KILLER *is unable to understand, then he smiles.*] Of course I'd forgotten that you're a girl—and all girls cry, especially when they're as happy as I know you are. I can just see how happy you

were when you brought all those pretty things and put them around for—our Christmas!

[*Fresh outbursts of tears from the girl. The* KILLER *thinks a moment, then takes the box containing the ring from his pocket, takes out ring and kisses it, then tiptoes over to the* GIRL, *takes her left hand, and slips the ring on her finger. She raises her head and looks at ring. The* SHERIFF *is seen at the window watching them; he is tickled to death, kisses his hand to them, and disappears from sight. The* GIRL *then rises and takes the ring off.*]

GIRL. No, Tom. No—I can't——

KILLER. You think it's too pretty for you, don't you—why, doggone me——

GIRL. No, it isn't that—Tom, you must listen—you must take back your ring—I—can't marry you——

KILLER. You—can't—marry me? Why—girl——

[*She turns away from him. He watches her, puzzled for a second, then he smiles.*]

I got to hand it to you—you almost fooled me—for a second I was taking you serious—but girl, you shouldn't—it's all too wonderful to joke about—so let's put back the little ring and—maybe you'd sorter make me—the happiest man in all this great Northwest—by—letting me kiss you—just once——

[SHERIFF *appears at the window.*]

GIRL. Tom—I'm not joking, I'm in earnest—I—can't marry you—because—I don't love you——

[MAN'S *face seen at opening of side door, also the* SHERIFF *at window.*]

KILLER. You—don't love me?

GIRL. No, Tom—I don't. I thought I did, but I don't.

KILLER. But I thought—why, I was so sure—you mean—there's someone else?

GIRL. Yes—there is.

KILLER. And do you love him?

GIRL. Yes. Oh Tom, please! Some day you'll understand——

KILLER. Why, it's all right, girl—and I'd want you to marry the man—you loved—I guess you don't understand my kind of love. I was only aiming to make you happy, and if to be happy you need this—*other man*—why, then, you've just got to marry him.

GIRL. You don't understand—and I daren't tell you.

KILLER. I understand why you couldn't love me, so we're going to forget that part of it, and think only of your happiness, and—Christmas time. We mustn't lose the Christmas feeling. So we're going to have our Christmas just the same. You and me—and the—other man, if he's here. Besides, the tree was just for you anyway.

GIRL. If you'll forgive me, Tom, some day you'll know the reason why.

KILLER. Why, there don't *have* to be any reason why.

[SHERIFF *enters at the door and comes down to them.*]

[*The* KILLER *turns to him.*] Why, Sheriff, I'd plumb forgot all about you; we were just talking—the girl and me.

SHERIFF. I was outside there—all the time—I didn't want to butt in—so I had to overhear—what she just said.

[MAN *at side door notices entrance of* SHERIFF.]

KILLER. We were just talking casually. Oh—this is the girl—Mary, this is Sheriff Hammond of Winnipeg. The Sheriff, he's up here on business, trying to locate that bandit they call the Killer.

GIRL. Oh! [*Looking at the* SHERIFF *in alarm*]

KILLER. We were just talking over our Christmas party, Sheriff, arranging things a bit. You see the girl here—she's going to be married—and when her—fian-cee fellow gets here—we're just going to nacherally tear things loose, and give them the doggondest rip-roaring Christmas any human ever had.

SHERIFF. But you told me—I mean I understood that you and her——

KILLER. Well, doggone me, if I don't think you really believed that yarn I told you just to be entertaining like. I sure stung

you that time. You see, girl, in a joking sort of way, I told the Sheriff that I was the lucky fellow that you were to marry and he, being such a mushy cuss, believed it. You'll have to hand it to me for that one, Sheriff. No, sir, this girl is going to marry a regular fellow, and we're going to have a regular Christmas, too, to celebrate it good and proper. So out with those turkeys and all the fixings——

[*Door at the side flies open, and the* MAN, *gun in hand, enters and covers the two men.*]

MAN. Put 'em 'way up, and keep 'em up—both of you——
[*Both raise hands.*]

GIRL. Bill——

MAN. You shut up——

KILLER. I didn't know you were invited to these Christmas festivities!

MAN. There's a few other things you don't know, too—one in particular—that this girl loves me—not you—and that she's going to *marry* me.

KILLER. [*To* GIRL] Then this is—the man——

GIRL. No, it's not—he's not the man——

SHERIFF. You put up that gun! I'm Sheriff Hammond from Winnipeg!

MAN. So I've just heard. So you're up here to land the Killer, are you?

KILLER. That's what he came for——

SHERIFF. Yes, and I've landed him too. So if you think that you can butt in now and cop that reward, you just lay off. I was here first!

MAN. [*Pointing to* KILLER] So he is the notorious——

SHERIFF. He's the Killer, I tell you! and he's going to surrender to me tomorrow, and the reward is *mine*—not *yours*, and I don't split it either—you're too late!

MAN. Well, just to make sure that he don't get away—we'll handcuff him with *your handcuffs*, so slip 'em on him—and do it quick!

SHERIFF. He's my prisoner. I'll attend to him myself—later.

MAN. [*Holds gun on* SHERIFF.] *Now!*

KILLER. Better do it, Sheriff!

SHERIFF. [*As he slips them on the* KILLER *with his hands behind his back*] I wanted to keep my word——

KILLER. That's all right, Sheriff.

MAN. [*To* SHERIFF] Now, you're next—I don't want you running around loose! [*To* GIRL] Here you—you put these [*Pointing to handcuffs on table and then to* SHERIFF] on him.

SHERIFF. You wouldn't dare——

MAN. [*To* GIRL] Quick, you! [*To* SHERIFF] Get your hands together.

KILLER. [SHERIFF *looks at* KILLER.] I guess he holds the joker, Sheriff.

[GIRL *handcuffs* SHERIFF.]

MAN. Now we're ready to begin these Christmas festivities I've heard so much about. [*He puts gun in holster.*]

KILLER. You'll find everything handy, wild turkeys, cranberries, and all the fixings. We can have a right good feed.

MAN. I don't think you're going to be here to enjoy it.

KILLER. I'd sure hate to miss those turkeys——

MAN. [*To* GIRL] You get ready—we're leaving here pronto!

SHERIFF. [*To* GIRL] You know this man?

GIRL. Yes, I do—he's——

MAN. You be careful——

GIRL. I won't. No difference what you say, he's got to *know.*

MAN. Go on then—finish it!

GIRL. [*To* KILLER] I lied to you. I do love you and no one else in all the world. This man forced me to say what I did to you,—if I hadn't he'd have killed you!

MAN. It's not too late yet!

KILLER. Now I understand—and you do love me—that's all that matters now——

GIRL. But now—it's too late!

MAN. That's the word—too late! And now, as the lawyers say,

we'll do a little summing up. [*To* SHERIFF] About you there is no mystery; you're just a sheriff from Winnipeg.

KILLER. He may remind you of that later.

MAN. [*To* KILLER] As for you——

KILLER. If you could sorter clear up my identity——

MAN. Easy work! [*He goes to the* KILLER, *tears open his vest, and reveals the badge of the Northwest Mounted Police—NWMP —reading.*] No. 1, Northwest Mounted Police, and you're Number One, too!

SHERIFF. What!!!

MAN. Captain Tom Wayne, the pet sleuth of the mounted boys —and in *irons!*

GIRL. Tom!—then you——

KILLER. [*To* SHERIFF] I hope you'll forgive me, Sheriff, for sorter misleading you—and handcuffing you—but you see if I had allowed you to handcuff me and take me in—I'd have missed this Christmas party!

MAN. So you were all looking for the Killer, were you? Well, the hunt's over, and as you're both in irons, I don't mind telling you that I'm the Killer!

SHERIFF. You—the Killer?!!!

GIRL. [*To* TOM] I knew it wasn't you!

KILLER. I'm sorry I can't be surprised. You see I knew it all along.

MAN. Yes, the Killer, and I'm going to live up to my reputation. [*Pointing to* SHERIFF] You, I won't bother about, I'll just hobble you and leave you here to starve. [*To* KILLER] But you've got the reputation of always getting your man. Here is where you lose that reputation, for I'm going to *get you* right now! [*Draws gun.*]

GIRL. No, not that!—don't—don't, and I'll go with you—I promise——

MAN. You're going away with me anyway. [*To* KILLER] You've got just two minutes for your "Now I lay me's"——

KILLER. Two minutes is a short time to say good-by to those hills —and her! [*Walks up stage to window and looks out at the hills.*]

SHERIFF. [*To* MAN] If you do this thing—and get away—I'll hunt for you the rest of my life.

MAN. [*To* GIRL] We'll take these *Christmas* things with us—get them together!

[*Crying, the* GIRL *stoops and gathers them together, the* MAN *helping. The* KILLER, *who is at the window, seeing that the man is not looking, puts his back to the edge of the window where the holster and the gun hangs, and with his right hand takes the gun from his holster and faces the* MAN. *The* MAN *has just lifted some of the things to the table; the* KILLER *walks down to him, holding the gun so that it is not visible to the audience, or to the* MAN.]

KILLER. It's tough to say good-by to those hills and these Christmas fixings—and you too, Sheriff—and you— [*To the* GIRL] but you'll always remember that I loved you, won't you?

MAN. I've heard that you were game, but at that I'll bet you've a streak of yellow—and I'm going to bring it out. [*Raises his gun and aims at the* KILLER.] Now, I'm going to count three—then——

KILLER. It's rough on the girl, ain't it—a thing like this? If she'd sort of turn around——

[*The* GIRL *is on the* MAN'S *right, the* KILLER *on his left, the* SHERIFF *up C. The* MAN *turns to the* GIRL.]

MAN. Better turn around——

[*She does so, crying. Just as the* MAN *swings around to the* KILLER, *the* KILLER *bends his body and swinging both hands around, fires! The gun drops from the* MAN'S *hand, and he grabs his right hand with his left, smearing it with carmine as he does so.*]

KILLER. Stand fast!

MAN. Damn you!!

SHERIFF. *God!*

GIRL. *Tom*——

KILLER. Now, girl, the handcuffs. The key is in my pocket. The Sheriff first!

[GIRL *takes the key from the* KILLER'S *pocket and unlocks the* SHERIFF'S *handcuffs.*]

Now, Sheriff, you turn me loose.

[SHERIFF *does so.*]

[*To* MAN] You keep reaching, just to get used to that stretching sensation, for soon it will be your *neck!*

SHERIFF. No wonder you are Number One!

KILLER. Sheriff, I promised that you should take the Killer back with you. Well, there he is—he's yours—reward and all!

SHERIFF. [*Going over and handcuffing the man*] Some Christmas present!—and when I get you alone!

KILLER. Rope him to a tree outside, Sheriff; he sorter *fogs* the Christmas atmosphere.

SHERIFF. Come on, before I forget my manners and mess up the place! [*He leads the* MAN *up to the door and turns.*] Where do you come in—Captain—on that reward? Shall we say fifty-fifty?

KILLER. Reward? [*He turns and holds out his arms to the* GIRL, *who runs into them.*]

GIRL. Tom—Tom——

KILLER. Reward? Why, we're just about to *begin—the Christmas festivities!*

[*As the* SHERIFF *yanks the* MAN *out of the door the curtain falls. At a later curtain the* GIRL *is seated under the Christmas tree, and the* KILLER *is kneeling by her side and is putting the ring on her finger. The* SHERIFF *is at the table holding up the turkeys and feeling of their plumpness.*]

CURTAIN

THE LEAN YEARS[1]

BY

MARY KATHARINE REELY

Mary Katharine Reely has lived in large cities, New York and Minneapolis, but she is concerned primarily with problems of rural and community development. At present she is associated with the Wisconsin Free Library Commission, where a keen interest in modern plays is a gratifying feature of the work. In college (The University of Michigan) Miss Reely had experience in writing short stories, but later discovered play-writing to be more interesting. The material of her writings for the stage is found in interests deep-seated in human emotion,—the concerns of daily life, its routine and its crises. Two examples of such short plays are *Daily Bread*, which must move everyone, especially the socially awake, and *A Window to the South*, which challenges general sympathy but especially that of rural women,—farm women.

The Lean Years is a study of present-day prosperity in a farmhouse somewhere west of the Mississippi. The use of the three "flash-back" scenes is a distinguishing feature of Miss Reely's comedy, for she here illustrates how this device of the movies, to visualize memory pictures, may be successfully employed in a play which is designed for stage representation.

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CHARACTERS

THOMAS B. CARSON
ELIZABETH CARSON
LETTY
RALPH

THE LEAN YEARS

SCENE: *The front porch of a prosperous farmhouse, somewhere west of the Mississippi. Ordinary articles of porch furniture are all the stage properties required.*

TIME: *The time of the play is the present, but at an important point in the action the curtain will descend suddenly and the scene will "flash back," as they say in the movies, to the eighteen-nineties.*

[*As the curtain goes up,* THOMAS B. CARSON *is discovered sitting in one of the comfortable porch chairs. He is holding a paper which he has been reading.* MRS. CARSON *sits near him with some darning in her lap.* LETTY *lolls in a hammock at the end of the porch.* RALPH *is pacing up and down, his hands in the pockets of his white flannel trousers.* RALPH *is a good-looking young man, ruddy and robust, but a little inclined to be dressy.* THOMAS B. CARSON *is looking at his son with a twinkle in his eye.*]

RALPH. [*Continuing a discourse*] I'm sick of it! All the fellows are making fun of me—riding 'round in that little tin Lizzie! "Say," Bill Nelson says to me the other night in town, "heard the last joke about a Ford?" "No," I says, biting like a sucker. "No," he says, "and you won't hear the last one for some time to come!" Gosh! And the fellows yelled! Just because I have to drive that darn little mosquito while all the rest of the bunch have decent cars! Makes me sick!

[*His father grins; his mother looks worried.*]

LETTY. [*Impetuously, sitting up in the hammock*] 'Tisn't as if we couldn't afford it. If the Nelsons can have a Packard and the Andersons a Hudson, and the Shanes——

T. B. Carson. [*Chuckling*] Old Jim Shane comes 'round to me last fall with a long face—wants his note renewed. "You know," he says, "that hailstorm last summer pretty near did for my corn—and wheat taking the slump it did hit me hard—and anyway wheat raising ain't what it used to be," he says. And I, of course, easy mark that I am, I says, "Well, Jim, I guess that's all right—let it run till you're good and ready." Kind o' pleased with myself, you know, doing an old neighbor a good turn—felt pleased about it all winter, thinking Jim's mind would be easy. And, by jinks, here this spring, out come the young Shanes in a new six-cylinder buzz-wagon! No, son, I guess you can rattle around in the Ford a while longer. We ain't going out of our way to advertise that we're in the Cadillac class.

Ralph. Oh, gosh, Dad!

Mrs. Carson. [*Soothingly*] Now, Ralph, your father knows best. Besides, you young people have all the luxuries now that are good for you. And with Letty going away to study music it will be all the expense——

Letty. [*Eagerly*] That's just it. That's why I am so keen on Ralph's having his new car. Now that I'm going to Chicago at last—to have what I've dreamed of all my life—and Ralph is to stay here on the farm——

T. B. Carson. Humph! Not to mention that Ralph is rather a lucky youngster to have a farm like this to stay on!

Letty. Oh, yes, of course, I understand that. Ralph is lucky—in a way. This is a good farm—not quite like starting out all new for himself.

T. B. Carson. [*Sarcastically*] Not quite!

Letty. [*Continuing*] And if Ralph wants to follow farming as a profession, it's all right—still, it isn't like going out into the world. If young people are to stay on the farm these days there must be compensations—and provision for recreation. [*She speaks with the air of one who is quoting things heard or read.*]

Ralph. Oh, gosh, Sis. I'm not asking anybody to pity me! All I'm asking——

T. B. Carson. All you're asking is to be allowed to cut more of a dash along the highway than the other young chaps.

Ralph. Well, and what of it? Why shouldn't I have a good time? Darn it all, there's something in what Sis says. She has a good time, going off to Chicago with nothing to do but rattle the piano for a few hours a day!

Letty. Ralph! I wish you wouldn't speak that way. You don't at all understand what my music means to me.

Mrs. Carson. That's all right, Letty. That's just Ralph's way of talking.

Letty. [*Making a face at* Ralph] Old smarty! He thinks it annoys me!

[Ralph *grins.*]

You don't think I'm selfish, do you, Mother?

Mrs. Carson. [*Gently*] Why, no, Letty, not that. You know how I've always wanted you to do well with your music, only——

Letty. [*As though justifying herself*] It isn't as if I would be throwing my time away. All my teachers have said that I have—talent. I don't know why I shouldn't say it! It isn't that I'm conceited, I just know that with the right chance I can make something of myself. I know you don't understand——

Mrs. Carson. Perhaps we understand.

Letty. I don't mean that you aren't sympathetic—but plodding along the way you have on the farm—and always contented with just that—you wouldn't understand this—this feeling I have that I must go on and make something of my life—that I must go forward—against all odds!

T. B. Carson. Well, I shouldn't wonder if your mother'd gone ahead against a few odds in her day, too. She's going ahead against that pile of socks now.

Letty. [*Impatiently*] Oh, Father! [*She throws herself back in the hammock, giving up the task as hopeless.*]

T. B. Carson. Well, that's all right, Letty. Nobody's grudging you your music lessons. But, by gum, when you come to think of it—Five dollars for a half hour's lesson—that's going some!

MRS. CARSON. Yes, it's going to be quite an expense.

RALPH. Look-a-here, you folks, you make me tired! Let me tell you a few things. You act as if you had to economize! [*He throws intense scorn into his word. The remainder of this speech, which is addressed directly to his father, should carry no suggestion of impertinence. The father's good-natured acceptance of it should add to this effect.*] You sold four carloads of hogs last fall—you put the money in the bank! You sold three carloads of young stock—you put the money in the bank! You sold your wheat—and not at slump prices, either—you held out for your own price, and you got it—and you put the money in the bank! Why, the dairy alone keeps up this place! The butter checks just about pay our running expenses—everything else is profit—and you put it in the bank.

T. B. CARSON. Listen to Young America.

RALPH. Yes, listen! You sit around and talk as if you had to scratch for a living—as if farming wasn't a paying proposition! Do you think I'd be taking it up if there wasn't something in it?

T. B. CARSON. [*Dryly*] There's still considerable hard work in it.

MRS. CARSON. That's it. The children don't know what hard work means, so they don't appreciate the value of money.

LETTY. Mother, you're always harping on that.

RALPH. But you aren't denying that the work brings in money. It pays. Isn't everything I said true? Money to burn, and you stick it in the bank to earn interest! Why the deuce can't we live as we go along?

MRS. CARSON. Now, Ralph, I won't have you talking to your father like that. We do live well. And you children have had advantages—you've had your schooling, and you've traveled, and you have your friends and dozens of interests that young people in my day didn't have—and your father and I don't begrudge you any of it. We want you to enjoy yourselves, but when you want to spend money for needless luxuries——

LETTY. Mother, you make me fairly tired with your everlasting

talk about economy! It isn't only in big things—like Ralph's car—it's everything! There you sit on this warm day and darn those old stockings—throw the whole lot away and buy new ones!

MRS. CARSON. Letty! Throw away good stockings!

LETTY. Oh, it isn't only the stockings—it's everything! You're always saving things. Why, I found you saving old newspapers—you said they came in handy for shelf papers and to line drawers—imagine, newspapers! And pieces of string! You're always rolling them up in little balls! And you're always tickled, yes, honestly tickled, when you buy something two cents cheaper—you might think we were foreigners the way you economize on little things. And my dresses—you're always looking at them and telling me how you could *turn* them and fix them in this year's style. If there is anything I hate—Why, Mother, you make me just ashamed!

MRS. CARSON. Why, Letty—Letty——

T. B. CARSON. [*Severely*] See here, young lady, you've said about enough.

LETTY. Well, I don't care, it is a disgrace—the way she is always squeezing pennies. Why, Mother, you're downright stingy!

MRS. CARSON. [*Letting her darning-ball roll to the floor and leaning forward to face her husband*] Tom! [*In a sharp voice*] Tom! Am I like that? Have I grown to be that kind of person?

RALPH. [*Trying to soothe his mother*] It isn't as though we were poor.

MRS. CARSON. [*Her eyes fixed on her husband's*] It isn't as though we were—poor!

T. B. CARSON. [*Repeating slowly*] No—not as though we were—poor!

QUICK CURTAIN

It must be understood that the three short scenes that follow give memory pictures that are passing through the minds of two of the characters. If similar pictures could be shown from the minds of the others they would consist perhaps of long white roads and whirring wheels, or of expansive concert halls and rows of white

and black keys—but those things are of the future; we are here concerned with the past.

The TOM *and* LIZZIE CARSON *of the intervening scenes must be played by two other actors as nearly like* T. B. CARSON *and* MRS. CARSON *as is possible and consistent with the changes due to passing years.*

SCENE I

SCENE: *Interior of a small frontier shack. The board walls are unpapered. There is one window. The furnishings consist of one cookstove, newly blacked; one cupboard, made of two dry-goods boxes set one on top of the other—the shelves of same are covered with newspaper cut into crude scallops and fantastic patterns; one pine table; two pine kitchen chairs; one small cheap rocker.*

[*Enter* TOM *and* LIZZIE CARSON. TOM *carries two canvas telescopes.* LIZZIE *precedes him into the room. Looks about her ecstatically.*]

LIZZIE. Oh, Tom! We're at home!

TOM. [*Dropping the telescopes and looking about dubiously*] It's a poor home to bring you to, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. [*Examining everything*] Oh, the darling cookstove! Tom, I'll bet you blacked that up just for me! I know you never kept it so bright and shining while you were batching! [*Taking off lid and peeking in*] And the fire all laid ready to light! Tom, bring a match and let's light it quick. The first fire in our own house!

TOM. Oh, come, Lizzie, take your coat off first.

[*He helps her awkwardly to remove the coat (vintage of 1890) which has a very tight waist and very big sleeves. But before the queer little hat that perches so absurdly on her head is removed, she spies the cupboard and darts over to that.*]

LIZZIE. Oh, and the dish cupboard! You made it yourself! And the lovely shelf paper! Tom, don't tell me—— [*With a sparkle of a laugh*] Don't tell me that you cut those yourself!

TOM. [*Proudly*] I did! Yes, sir; I did. Say, I tell you I sat up nights working out that pattern. You know you fold it all up and then snip around with the shears—and till you open it out you don't know what you're going to get! I got some awfully queer-looking ones before I worked out this one. It don't look so bad, does it, Liz?

LIZZIE. Oh, Tommy! It's lovely—it's beautiful! [*With a little spring, she goes to his arms.*] Tom, I love everything in our home—because you made it, with your own hands—for me.

TOM. [*His arms around her, one hand patting her shoulder*] It's a pretty poor home to bring you to, old girl. It's not much like what you been used to back in Ohio—only two little rooms—when you been used to a parlor and everything.

LIZZIE. But, Tom, this is *ours!* And I think we have lots of things—a cookstove, a cupboard, and dishes—and a table—and two chairs—Oh, Tom, and that nice little rocker! Let me sit in it—I know you bought it for me. [*She breaks away to sit in the little rocker, rocking herself so hard that the absurd little hat that is still perched on her head wobbles dangerously.*]

TOM. [*Admiring her*] Lizzie, you'd look a lot more at home if you'd take your hat off.

LIZZIE. [*Laughing*] Oh, so I would. Help me find the pins, Tom.

[*Together they get the hat off, and* TOM, *for no reason at all, kisses her.*]

TOM. Gosh, Lizzie, it looks good to see you here!

LIZZIE. It's good to be here, Tom—in our own home, on our own farm! Tom, isn't it wonderful to own a whole farm—all by ourselves!

TOM. Well, Lizzie, we don't exactly own it yet. There's that little matter of a mortgage to pay off.

LIZZIE. [*Snapping her fingers*] Pish! What's that! Why, we'll do that in no time, with good crops for a year or two. And in the meantime, think what fun we'll be having, living here all by ourselves. [*Jumping up*] Now, tell me about the neighbors, Tom. Do we have any neighbors? [*Running to the window*]

TOM. [*Following*] Well, you can't see from here, but we got neighbors all right. There's Shane's place only five miles down that way—nice folks they are—he's got a nice wife and two little boys. I'll take you over to see them some day, Lizzie. It's only five miles—that's nothing out here—we don't count distance like you do back east.

LIZZIE. [*Bravely*] Five miles—why, that's nothing at all. We could drive over there in an hour most any day, couldn't we?

TOM. Well—our team could pretty near do it in an hour. And then about the same distance down the other way there's some Swedes settled—but they're nice folks, Lizzie—even if they don't talk much English. And work—say, a fellow has to hustle to keep up with them!

LIZZIE. We'll keep up all right!

TOM. And awfully good-hearted folks—there's a Mrs. Nelson over there that's been sending me a batch of bread once in a while—say, she can cook.

LIZZIE. Humph! Bet you've forgotten what good cooking is! But, Tom, it's time to get supper! Come on—let's light our fire! The first fire in our own home! [*Seizing his hand and speaking more seriously*] You do think we'll get on, don't you, Tom? That we'll pay off the mortgage—and everything'll be all right?

TOM. It's just got to be all right now you're here, Lizzie. Come on, now light your fire. [*He leads her to the stove, opens the door, gives her a match.*] Here you are, Liz.

LIZZIE. Tom, it will be an omen! Our first fire! If it burns well, and the chimney draws, and it doesn't smoke—it will mean we are going to succeed!—Here—you light it!

TOM. No, I want you should, Lizzie. Our first fire!

[LIZZIE *strikes the match, kneels slowly and reverently to apply it*, TOM *shielding her hands with his own.*]

CURTAIN

Scene II

Same as before, with a cradle added. The stage is somewhat dark, with a dull, yellowish light. Lizzie *kneels by the cradle, rocking it gently.* Tom *is pacing up and down, looking now and again out of the window. He looks disheveled.* Lizzie *is wan and pale. The time is something over a year later.*

Lizzie. Don't you think we might try the door open again, Tom?

Tom. [*Savagely*] What's the use? It's hotter outside than in!

Lizzie. I know it, Tom, but it's so close. A little fresh air——

Tom. Fresh air! Fresh from a furnace! There! [*Flinging open the door*] There's your fresh air! Feel it! [*Holding out his hand to the hot breeze*]

Lizzie. [*Under her breath*] Oh, my God, Tom—it's like a bake oven—and the dust, the dust—close the door. [*She adjusts a cheesecloth canopy over the baby's cradle.*] There, there, Mother's baby! Does the old dust settle down on her little face? [*Rocks the cradle gently, then rises and moves about the room. Runs her hand over the table.*] Tsut! Tsut! I can't stand it! [*Gets a duster from behind the stove and wipes off top of table and window sill.*] Tom, this window sill is hot—actually hot to my hands—and the walls—feel them, Tom!

Tom. [*Who has thrown himself heavily in a chair*] I know—my God—I know!

Lizzie. What do you suppose we're coming to? It isn't natural—this hot wind—hour after hour. They say Mrs. Shane's old mother thinks the end of the world is coming—I don't know as I blame her—maybe it is.

Tom. [*Harshly*] The end's come for us all right.

Lizzie. Oh, Tom, maybe not. Maybe if it should blow up a rain——

Tom. Blow up a rain! That's what we've been saying for weeks. We said it last night—"If rain should come yet," we said, "even after all these weeks, it mightn't be too late." And off there

in the west were the wind clouds—"It may blow up a rain," we said. Early this morning I heard the breeze stirring—"There she comes," I thinks—and by God, she came! A wind off the fires of hell! There! [*He goes to the door again and throws it open.*] Listen! Hear that rattle? That pitter-patter—like rain—like raindrops on the roof? Know what it is? It's the rattle of the corn—the nice, refreshing breeze blowing through our corn—burning it to a crisp! All the rain in heaven couldn't help us now! [*He bangs the door and hurls himself into a chair by the table, burying his head in his arms—his shoulders heaving.*]

LIZZIE. [*Brokenly*] Tom—Tom—Tom! [*A cry from the cradle reaches her ears. She crosses to the cradle, removes the cheesecloth, soothes the baby, murmuring.*] There—there, Mother's baby, Mother's precious little Letty—Mother knows how warm it is—there—there——

TOM. [*Lifting his head*] Can't you just remember how it was back in Ohio, Liz?

LIZZIE. Let's not think about that, Tom.

TOM. Always so green, Liz. Even in late summer the pastures were green—and plenty of rain—never a dry spell like this—and never hot.

LIZZIE. Well, sometimes a little warm, Tom.

TOM. And always plenty of rain—nice cool rains every day or so.

LIZZIE. Yes, it was lovely, Tom.

TOM. And to think that we left it for this—this country that God forgot. Well, we've had enough of it! We've learned our lesson—we're going back!

LIZZIE. [*Looking wistfully about*] And leave our nice little home, Tom!

TOM. Fine home it is—with nothing to live on!

LIZZIE. There, there, Letty. Does the horrid dust bother you—there, there—Mother won't let it! Is it true, Tom, the Shanes are thinking of going back?

TOM. Well, yes, I guess so—anyway, Jim will go if I do.

LIZZIE. And if we stay?

TOM. Well, I can't say——

LIZZIE. And the Nelsons, and the other Swedes?

TOM. Well, I suppose the Swedes will stick—you see they've come across the ocean.

LIZZIE. [*Thoughtfully*] It would be rather a long way to go back—wouldn't it? And I suppose they'd feel rather sheepish,—and all their folks would say "I told you so—that country out there's no good—why didn't you listen to us and stay here at home—why couldn't you know when you were well off—with a good job clerking in the grocery store—now you can ask Uncle Amos to let you have your job back—and Lizzie can go back to the old folks——"

TOM. Lizzie, what you talking about?

LIZZIE. About going back, Tom. Don't you just know what they'll say to us? Aunt Elvira and all of 'em! Tom, I *won't* go back! [*She brings her fists down on the edge of the cradle, disturbing the baby.*] There—there, baby. Mother's getting excited, but she didn't mean to disturb her precious!

TOM. [*Who has been looking very steadily at* LIZZIE] What do you reckon we're going to live on, Lizzie, if we stay?

LIZZIE. Lord only knows, Tom. What will the Swedes live on?

TOM. Lord knows, Liz—white beans, I guess. It's the only crop we've got this year.

LIZZIE. Then we'll live on white beans! And next year, maybe—why, Tom, it just can't be like this every year! [*Suddenly—starting to her feet*] Tom, the wind's gone down!

TOM. [*Lifting his head*] Why, so it has—or has it only shifted around to the other side? [*Rising*]

LIZZIE. [*Quicker than he, darts to the window.*] Tom! That looks like a thundercloud. [*Opens the door.*] It is, Tom! And the wind has changed—and it's cooler!

TOM. [*Moving slowly toward the door*] Too late for it to do any good now.

LIZZIE. But it will be cooler and will settle the dust—and any-

way, there's always next year. Tom, feel it—it's *rain!* [*She holds out both her arms.*]

TOM. Yes, there's next year——

[TOM *throws an arm around his wife's shoulders and they stand together, lifting their faces to the oncoming rain.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE III

Same as before, with an added touch or two to indicate slight prosperity, curtains at the window, perhaps. If possible have the cookstove moved out. The time is a late autumn afternoon some two or three years later. LIZZIE *is moving about the room, looking now and then out of the window. Running to the door, she waves her hand and calls.*

LIZZIE. Hoo-hoo! Are you coming in now or going to put up the team first? Oh, all right—that won't take long, will it? Supper's all ready. [*Exit through a door at the right; returns bearing a covered dish. Exit again R.*]

[TOM *enters through the outer door—looks about him with a secretive air.*]

[LIZZIE *looks in at the door.*] Hello, Tom.

TOM. Hello, Liz. Kids asleep?

LIZZIE. Yes, I gave them their supper early. They've played so hard today. Take your coat off and sit down, Tom. I'll bring your coffee in a minute—I didn't want to make it till you came. [*While talking she has gone back into the kitchen.*]

TOM. No hurry, Liz. [*He tiptoes about, again with that secretive air, takes a peep through the kitchen door, then makes a sudden bolt for the outer door; he comes back in a moment pushing something before him—a sewing-machine.*]

LIZZIE. [*Calling*] You might sit down, Tom, and help yourself to the potatoes—I'll be in in just a moment.

TOM. All right, Liz. [*He pushes the machine back against the wall near the kitchen door, makes a dive for his chair, and begins rattling the dishes.*]

LIZZIE. [*Entering*] Here's the coffee, Tom. I'm so sorry you had to wait.

TOM. [*Genially*] Oh, that's all right, Liz.

LIZZIE. [*Sits down opposite him and pours his coffee.*] Now, tell me all about it, Tom.

TOM. [*Quizzically*] About what?

LIZZIE. Oh, you know, Tom. Did you get a good price?

TOM. [*Beaming*] You bet I did, Liz.

LIZZIE. Oh, Tom! As much as you expected?

TOM. More!

LIZZIE. [*Clasping her hands*] Oh, Tom!

TOM. Market had gone up two cents!

LIZZIE. Oh, Tom! And you sold all the crop?

TOM. Yep!

LIZZIE. Oh, Tom! And you put the money in the bank!

TOM. Yep!

LIZZIE. Oh, Tom, isn't it *wonderful* to put money in the *bank?* Let's see the bank book, Tom, to see what it looks like!

[TOM *hands over the book, which she looks at reverently.*] I can hardly believe it, and now we can make a payment on the mortgage. Isn't it glorious?

TOM. It sure is. [*He takes a hearty drink of coffee.*]

LIZZIE. How's the coffee, Tom?

TOM. Fine! You're a great cook, Liz.

LIZZIE. How much do you think I paid for it, Tom?

TOM. Good price—judging by the taste.

LIZZIE. Tom, that's Arbuckle's nine cent coffee! Now, isn't it just as good as any twelve or even eighteen cent coffee you ever drank? I got this package to try, and now after this, by buying three at a time, I can get a reduction——

TOM. Say, Liz, you are the girl to squeeze the pennies!

LIZZIE. [*Rising, in mock indignation*] Well, it's mighty lucky

for you, Mr. Tom Carson, that you have a wife who knows how to squeeze the pennies! I'd like to know where you'd be if you hadn't. [*With a little curtsy, she turns and flings toward the kitchen, coming face to face with the machine. She stops.*] Why, Tom! [*She says under her breath.*] It's a sewing-machine! [*Gazing at it mutely for a moment, she drops to her knees, her hands clasped. Then, burying her face in her hands, she sobs noiselessly.*]

TOM. [*Pushing back his chair and rising*] Why, Lizzie—why, Lizzie, girl. What's the matter? Why, Lizzie, I thought you'd be kind o' pleased.

[*He raises her to her feet; she clings to his shoulder.*]

LIZZIE. Oh, I am, Tom. I am!

TOM. But what you crying about!

LIZZIE. Oh, Tom, because I'm so happy! [*Laughing and crying*] Oh, Tom, I was never so happy in my life! [*Wiping her eyes and looking at the treasure*] A sewing-machine. [*Breaking away from* TOM, *she goes over to examine it; she takes off cover.*] How does it work? [*Turns wheel.*] Oh, I'm so glad the wheel goes forward. I can't abide a machine that starts backward—not but what I'd have been just as pleased to have one. Oh, Tom, you darling!

TOM. Looks kind of nice, don't it, Liz? Sort of helps furnish the room.

LIZZIE. It looks lovely, Tom. And won't I have a good time using it, though? I'll make you a new shirt first thing, Tom. And I'll make some new little dresses for Letty. It threads just like Mother's—[*She is still examining the machine, standing off to admire it.*] It does look nice, Tom—and just fills up the space left by the stove.

TOM. Yea, that's what I thought, Liz, when we built the lean-to for the stove. I thinks to myself, "By jinks, if the crop turns out good this year, and we get a fair price, I'm going to get something nice for Lizzie." First, I thought of a sofa—one of those plush ones, you know—then it just came to me one day that a sewing-machine was the thing.

LIZZIE. Oh, yes, Tom—there's nothing I'd rather have than a machine. And I can do so much with it. But, Tom, your supper's getting all cold—come and sit down and let me give you another cup of coffee.

TOM. But, Lizzie, you aren't eating anything yourself.

LIZZIE. Oh, I ate a bite with the children—besides, I'm too happy to eat. Tom, I know what I'm going to make first—a little suit for Ralphie—like one I saw a picture of in the *Ladies' World*—it was all in one piece, Tom—a plain waist and little panties, with a belt around—look, Tom [*She measures off on her own person.*]—a child's romper, it was called—and looked awfully cute, and sensible too—they say little boys are wearing them instead of kilts—they are putting little boys into trousers sooner than they used to—at three or four years—or even two, they say. Tom, wouldn't Ralphie look cute in little panties?

TOM. [*Grinning*] And what you going to make for yourself, Lizzie?

LIZZIE. Oh, I'm all right. Maybe after a while I'll make my blue dress over again.

TOM. [*Rising slowly and coming around to his wife's chair*] Well, the time's coming, old girl, when you won't have to make over your clothes.

LIZZIE. Why, I don't mind, Tom. Besides, I think it's kind of interesting to see what you can do with old things.

TOM. [*He stands behind his wife's chair, his hands on her shoulders. She reaches her own hands up to clasp his. Her chair is turned so that she faces the audience, and there is a far-away look in her eyes, as though she looked into the future.*] Just the same, the time's coming when there won't be any need—now that we've got a start we can stand a bad year once in a while—and then bad years are so rare out here. Oh, this is God's own country, Liz—not like back in Ohio, where you had to dig for everything you got. Yessir, Liz, some day we're going to be rich! And we're going to have things! And do you know, Liz, what I'm going to have first? I made up my mind to it while I was driving along

today behind those old plugs! I'm going to have a driving horse! Yessir, a nice little roadster—just for driving—and a little runabout, with yellow wheels!—Hum—some speed we'll make along the highway, eh, Lizzie?

LIZZIE. Oh, Tom, you are the greatest one to want to *go*—I don't mind plodding—and now that I have my new machine and the lean-to built on for the stove, I can't think of anything else I could possibly want—I feel so rich now! Unless—there's just one thing—Oh, I wonder if we could have it before Letty grows up! Tom—I want to have a cabinet organ, so's Letty can take music lessons—there's a teacher come to Millsville, they say, that gives a term of lessons, twenty for five dollars—Oh, Tom! Do you suppose we could ever afford it?

TOM. I shouldn't wonder if we could afford it, old girl. Why, Lizzie, the time's coming when we can afford anything!

CURTAIN

And then a return to the original scene. The characters keep the positions they had when the curtain fell for the first intervening scene. T. B. CARSON *and* MRS. CARSON *are looking at one another with fixed gaze.* RALPH *and* LETTY *appear to be puzzled.*

RALPH. Well, say, come out of it!

T. B. CARSON. Say, Lizzie, whatever became of that old sewing-machine—the one I brought home to you?

MRS. CARSON. Why, Tom, how funny—I was just thinking about that, too. It's in the attic, Tom. I could never bear to part with it. Why, [*Turning to look at her son, running her eye over him from head to foot*] I made Ralph's first little panties on that machine.

RALPH. Well, what in the name of—What's come over you? Here we sit, having a sensible conversation, and all of a sudden you two go off into a kind of trance for five minutes or so, and then come back out of it and begin to talk about—[*Looks down at his immaculate trousers.*] Oh, gosh!

MRS. CARSON. Well, you did look cute in them. Didn't he, Tom? Wouldn't it have been nice, Tom, if there'd been kodaks in those days, so's we could have had pictures of the children?

T. B. CARSON. [*Chuckling*] Now, Liz, you know you would never have let me buy one. You were a great girl to save the pennies, Lizzie.

MRS. CARSON. And wasn't it a lucky thing for you that I was?

T. B. CARSON. Darn lucky. Liz, do you remember that hot wind?

LETTY. Well, what started this anyway?

MRS. CARSON. Why, I don't know—something Ralphie or one of you said set me to thinking of old times. Let's see, what were we talking about anyway? Oh, Ralph wanted something, didn't he?

T. B. CARSON. Yes—a runabout.

MRS. CARSON. With yellow wheels?

[*They both laugh.*]

RALPH. Well, I give up.

[*He and* LETTY *exchange glances.*]

MRS. CARSON. Whatever became of it, Tom?

TOM. I gave it away to that young what's-his-name when he was getting his start. I believe they're still using it to take milk to factory. Pretty fine little cart that was—and, say, I never had a nicer little horse—remember that first Fourth of July celebration we went to?—passed everything on the road!

MRS. CARSON. [*Looking from* RALPH *to his father*] Tom! I don't know as we can blame Ralph—he comes by it naturally.

T. B. CARSON. What?

MRS. CARSON. His love for speed—the way he likes to *go!*

TOM. [*Grinning*] Well, what about Letty and her music lessons at five dollars a half hour?

MRS. CARSON. Twenty lessons for five dollars, Tom.

[*They laugh again.*]

LETTY. Well, really, I don't like to interrupt—but what has got into you two?

MRS. CARSON. Why, we were just talking about your first music lessons, Letty. Don't you remember? Miss Casey used to come out from Millsville once a week to give you a lesson.

LETTY. Oh, heavens, yes—on that funny old cabinet organ—don't you remember it had queer little knick-knacks on it—and little shelves where you put family portraits, and a vase with dried grasses and everlastings in it! Aren't those old things killing when you think about them?

T. B. CARSON. [*With sarcastic emphasis*] Quite killing.

MRS. CARSON. We had a party, Tom, the night we brought it home—do you remember? And I chorded for you to play the mouth organ—and old Jim Larson brought his fiddle and we danced—do you remember——

RALPH. Well, say——

T. B. CARSON. [*Who has come around behind his wife's chair to take the position held at the end of the preceding scene.*] Those were great old times, Lizzie. Whatever became of——

RALPH. Well, say——

T. B. CARSON. What? Would you young folks mind running away—your mother and I have some things to talk about.

[RALPH *and* LETTY *rise, looking hurt.*]

And, by the way, there're a couple of new catalogues from Detroit in there on my desk—you might look 'em over and pick out what you want.

LETTY. Oh, Father! Can Ralph have his car?

T. B. CARSON. Think we can afford it, Lizzie?

MRS. CARSON. [*Laughing a little unsteadily*] I guess maybe we can afford it now, Tom.

T. B. CARSON. [*In imitation of* RALPH] It isn't as though we were poor.

MRS. CARSON. [*With slow emphasis and inner meaning—in her eyes the far-away look of one who sees into the past*] No—it isn't as though we were—poor!

CURTAIN

PIERROT BEFORE THE SEVEN DOORS[1]

BY

ARTHUR CANTILLON

Authorized English version by Hermon Ould

The origin of Pierrot as a figure for the theater is obscure, but tradition points toward Italy. Since the Renaissance, Pierrot, and also Columbine, Punch, and Harlequin, have come down through stage history, each having fixed attributes and representing a special quality of character. In their distinctive guise these personages pervade much of the recently written theatrical fantasy, and of this type of play *Pierrot before the Seven Doors* is a commendable example. In it there is also some suggestion of the "morality" play, which, from medieval times, has shown in dramatic metaphor the soul of man in its pilgrimage through the world.

The author of this Pierrot play is Arthur Cantillon, one of the most esteemed among the younger Belgian writers. Outstanding examples of his dramatic work are *Robinson*, *A Night in May*, and *The Treasure of the Mountains*. The last two are fairy plays, written in collaboration with Blanche Rousseau. The authorized English translation of *Pierrot before the Seven Doors* is by the English dramatist Hermon Ould. Among Mr. Ould's published plays are *The Dance of Life*, *The Piper Laughs*, and a high-spirited comedy in one act, *Thy Father and Thy Mother*.

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CHARACTERS

Pierrot
The Old Man
Puppazina
Punch
Harlequin
Death
The Young Man

PIERROT BEFORE THE SEVEN DOORS

SCENE: *The stage is bare. There are six wings and six doors; also seats and tables where necessary. In the sky a great moon shines placidly.*

[*As the curtain rises* PIERROT *enters and sits down stage center with an air of despair.*]

PIERROT. No eyes could be bluer than hers. Nothing was sweeter than her laughter, nothing so clear as her voice, so pure as her singing. Nothing rosier than her cheeks, nothing more tender—nothing . . . nothing . . .

Nothing was more false than her heart . . .

Leander! Faithless friend! If only I did not fear to stain my blouse red! . . .

What is to become of me? What is to become of me? I drag my life about as one might drag a dead body. Oh, that I might cease to be! Oh, to make an end!

The river over which I crossed was as white and peaceful as the sky. I contemplated it as one might contemplate a tempting bed, and I, on the bridge above, was a white gift that offered itself . . . I stretched out my arms to plunge . . .

But your reflection suddenly confronted me, holy moon, my mother! And I did not wish to disturb your image, whom my death might trouble . . .

What loneliness, O my mother! This throbbing silence is filled with my anguish!

Oh, that I might end my misery! Is there no one else alive in the whole world? Is there nothing that can tear me from myself and help me to forget?

O you shut doors, what have you to offer me? [*Suddenly he rises, goes to the first door on the left, and knocks.*]

Tap, tap!

A Voice. Who is there?

Pierrot. I am Pierrot, son of the moon. . . .

The Voice. What do you want of me?

Pierrot. I hardly know myself. Who are you? Whoever you may be, I would speak with you.

The Old Man. [*On the threshold*] What can I do for you, white friend?

Pierrot. Can you do anything? What can anyone do for me?

The Old Man. You are in trouble?

Pierrot. Who told you?

The Old Man. Either one is drunk or in trouble, to knock at strange doors.

Pierrot. Are you a wizard?

The Old Man. There are no wizards. . . . So, Columbine . . .?

Pierrot. Don't speak of her.

The Old Man. Why not? On the contrary, if you are suffering because of her, it would be reasonable to speak of her a great deal.

Pierrot. I see you are a philosopher.

The Old Man. There are no longer any philosophers. . . .

Pierrot. Then you are a saint. I have seen you before, in a picture by Rembrandt, seated near a staircase. . . . So you know about my trouble? What can you do for me? Speak at once. How can I forget?

The Old Man. But why forget?

Pierrot. Ah! Why forget? You are queer! Remembrance is killing me.

The Old Man. To forget is even harder.

Pierrot. My memory is poisoned by a few frightful moments. . . .

The Old Man. Concentrate on the sweetest moment in your memory. . . . Did you love her?

PIERROT. Madly.

THE OLD MAN. And you wish to forget her?

PIERROT. Yes. No . . . But I do not wish to suffer any longer.

THE OLD MAN. Try to forgive her.

PIERROT. Silent, foolish prating old man. You say nothing worth hearing! You belong to the old, old gang, I see. . . .

THE OLD MAN. At my age one belongs to no gang. One has become the friend of all.

PIERROT. You are an old dotard! I was a fool to knock here. I will take my custom elsewhere. Good-night!

THE OLD MAN. Poor, simple child! To suffer on a night as beautiful as this! Foolish men—who make their lives dependent on the flimsy things of this world when they might link themselves to things divine, which endure! Poor fools! [*He seats himself at his door.*]

PIERROT. Old dotard! Down with these dried-up old bodies that have forgotten what life is! Fortunately there are other doors! Which shall I try now? Ah, here is a highly-polished knocker! Now this door does indeed attract me! [*He goes to the third door back stage left and knocks.*]

Tap, tap!

[*Silence.*]

Tap, tap!

[*Silence.*]

Oh, oh! They sleep soundly in this abode! Well, I've no time to wait. If nothing better offers elsewhere, perhaps I will come back again later. . . . But what a pretty knocker *this* is! Like the mysterious head of a sphynx. This pleases me. I'm quite eager to try here.

Tap, tap!

A VOICE. Is that you, Pierrot?

PIERROT. What a pretty voice! And she knows me! Yes, madam, it is I, Pierrot.

PUPPAZINA. [*Coming out of her door*] I was watching you through the keyhole. Good-evening, Pierrot! How nice of you to come to see me! I was so horribly bored, alone, tonight. . . .

PIERROT. You seem to know me . . .

PUPPAZINA. And you don't know who I am, Pierrot? How remarkable! Don't be uneasy; come nearer. I am an old friend of Columbine. She has often listened to my advice. . . .

PIERROT. Oh, in that case . . . [*He turns to go.*]

PUPPAZINA. [*Holding him back*] How silly you are! I instructed her in the art of toilet—how to lighten the tone of her voice, how to dance and how to walk . . . a thousand matters, Pierrot, in which I am an expert. Why does your face grow dark when I speak of her? Surely she can't have deceived you?

PIERROT. I dislike this subject.

PUPPAZINA. Very well, then; let us talk of something else. That won't be difficult. To what am I indebted for the pleasure of seeing you?

PIERROT. I knocked at the door at random, without selecting . . .

PUPPAZINA. What a gallant you are! And what are you looking for?

PIERROT. I seek only to forget. Will you not help me?

PUPPAZINA. That's better. But call me Puppazina; that's my name. So you want to be amused. Come here, then! Ah! You're not a bad-looking boy. I might be able to . . .

PIERROT. You think you could . . .?

PUPPAZINA. I know all sorts of things, Pierrot, which sometimes make men forget things which they ought to remember. I can sing songs so gay that they bring tears to the eyes, and songs so sad that they too make you weep. I know lots of things. And some of them I tell only to people who are very good. . . . Come inside, my friend. You will soon forget Columbine. . . .

PIERROT. [*Drawing back*] That old man over there . . .

PUPPAZINA. He is an old fool.

PIERROT. I told him so . . . Nevertheless . . .

PUPPAZINA. Am I not pretty, Pierrot? Look at my face . . .

PIERROT. You have pretty eyes, and they have a very tender look in them. Have you a heart that is true, Puppazina?

PUPPAZINA. A what?

PIERROT. A heart.

PUPPAZINA. A heart?

PIERROT. Yes, a heart. Don't you know what a heart is, Puppazina?

[PUPPAZINA *utters a long, irritating laugh, which ceases abruptly, like a spring that snaps.*]

PUPPAZINA. Ha! ha! ha! What a queer word! What a queer question! Ha! ha! ha! A heart! Ha! ha!

[*Abrupt silence.*]

PIERROT. Here, Puppazina! What do you mean? . . . What is the matter with her? [*He tries to readjust her, pushes first one arm and then the other. She makes the movements of a dislocated puppet.*] Heavens! She's not alive at all! It was only a doll! Oh, Pierrot, it needed only this to complete your adventures! A rag doll! A miserable automaton! And I only just escaped being caught up in your clockwork. Back to your box . . . toy! [*He throws her behind the door, which he closes. Then he sits down, his head in his hands, at the front of the stage.*]

THE OLD MAN. Listen to me, Pierrot, listen to me! Don't reject remembrance! Cherish it—remove the blight from it and let it blossom!

PIERROT. Shut up, old fool, shut up! There are still more doors to try. Ah! I wonder if they are still sleeping behind this one. [*He goes to the second door on the right and knocks.*]

Tap, tap!

[*Silence.*]

No answer! Deuce take the lazy creatures. Who is likely to live here?

Tap, tap!

No—unbroken silence! Never mind! Let us go elsewhere. Here? Let's see!

Tap, tap!

A VOICE. [*After a pause*] Hello? Who goes there?

PIERROT. I am Pierrot, son of the moon.

THE VOICE. Go to the devil!

PIERROT. Fie! What politeness!

THE OLD MAN. Don't persist there, Pierrot! You won't find there the joy you're seeking.

PIERROT. What do you know about it, old spoil-sport? Suppose it pleases me to try everything? Hello there, old fellow; open the door to Pierrot!

THE VOICE. Has he brought me something to drink?

PIERROT. To drink? I will give you two pots full!

THE VOICE. Good!

[*The door is opened.* PUNCH *appears, rubbing his drink-sodden face to rouse himself.*]

PUNCH. Oh, so it's you, Pierrot! I took you for a ray of the moon. So you are going to treat me to a drink, my friend?

PIERROT. Yes, but first of all you must tell me . . .

PUNCH. Nothing, before I've had a drink. My throat is far too dry.

PIERROT. Punch, can you help me to forget?

PUNCH. Of course! For I can help you to drink! When are you going to give me that pot? Let's come and see Harlequin. He is a good inn-keeper, and honest enough if one is careful not to pay him more than half of what he asks. [*He knocks at the first door on the right.*] Hello there! Harlequin! I'm bringing you a customer.

HARLEQUIN. [*Opening the door at once*] How now, how now, old toper, already up? Good-evening, Pierrot. Did you find him sleeping off his drunkenness in the river? Well, well! What do my good friends want?

PIERROT. To forget . . .

PUNCH. To drink . . .

HARLEQUIN. It's the same thing. Sit down. The night is fine. I will serve you with my most delicate wine. Then we will play dice. . . . If you want to forget, Pierrot, that is even better than drinking.

PUNCH. Joker!

PIERROT. Drunkard!

PUNCH. Do you want to plunder me, rascal?

PIERROT. Which shall we do? Which of you offers me the most?

PUNCH. [*Bottle in hand*] Look at it, pallid one! Look at it! There is no memory that can resist two hours' contact with this reality. Ah! Many a memory have I drowned in it!

HARLEQUIN. Who would think about his little troubles when intoxicated by the passion of gambling? Fair, dark, auburn—what matters it? Is it an ace, a double-six, a trump!

PUNCH. Let us drink!

HARLEQUIN. Let us play!

PUNCH. Let us play and drink: the two go well together!

HARLEQUIN. Let us play for a couple of crowns: six throws!

PUNCH. Good! Agreed! [*They drink and throw dice.*]

PIERROT. Are you sure, Harlequin . . .

HARLEQUIN. Begin! Six and two. I'll take the score.

PIERROT. Are you sure that these little ivory cubes . . .

PUNCH. Five and six!

HARLEQUIN. Six and three!

PIERROT. Will this suffice to blot out the memory of her cruel face . . . ?

PUNCH. Play, and drink! Three and two! What do you think of the wine?

PIERROT. I tasted better, one evening, with her . . .

PUNCH. Her! Her! Enough of her! Fill up your glass!

HARLEQUIN. Five and six!

PIERROT. Do you promise me . . . ?

PUNCH. Double-four! Fetch another bottle! Drink, Pierrot!

PIERROT. Shall I forget? [*He hesitates.*]

PUNCH. Yes.

PIERROT. Forever?

PUNCH. Ha! ha!

HARLEQUIN. To your health! Why don't you play, Pierrot?

PIERROT. Oh, it bores me . . .

HARLEQUIN. You owe a couple of crowns! Do you want your revenge?

PUNCH. Play!

PIERROT. Shall I forget only for a moment?

PUNCH. Oh, what tranquillity will be yours! You will laugh in the face of the moon and think no more of anything!

PIERROT. But tomorrow? Tomorrow?

PUNCH. Tomorrow? Maybe you will have a headache?

PIERROT. And then?

PUNCH. Ha! ha! Then you will drink again.

PIERROT. And between my two bouts of tipsiness?

HARLEQUIN. Are you going to play?

PIERROT. Oh, leave me alone!

HARLEQUIN. What a wretched player!

PIERROT. Ah, wretched indeed! Why lie to me? You horrible hunchback, *you* are quite familiar with those anguishful awakenings when the heart beats abominably against one's ribs, when the day is cursed at its very beginning! Ah! You know quite well how miserable one is, in spite of all your wine! Pitiless liar, why should I make myself intoxicated only to suffer the more when I become sober?

PUNCH. Silence, fool!

PIERROT. Both the overwhelming misery of a body broken by debauchery and the spleen caused by disgust!

PUNCH. Be silent! Or I will break your head with this bottle!

HARLEQUIN. On with the game, idiots!

PIERROT. No, no! Go to the devil! All your remedies only put the pain to sleep; and when slumber has revived it, it will sting all the more every morning. No. I will have none of your wine-bottles or your dice! [*He draws apart.*]

HARLEQUIN. Let him go elsewhere to find a cord to hang himself with!—This poor wretch is no subject for laughter!

PUNCH. But see, he's settling down again. What fun can one get out of such a miserable scarecrow? His affairs have quite depressed me!

HARLEQUIN. Donkey! I know what to do. Let's go to Puppazina. There we can drink and play, you old roué!

PIERROT. Puppazina is dead. I killed her with a word.

HARLEQUIN. [*Going to* PUPPAZINA'S *door, hanging on* PUNCH'S *arm*] As if your words could kill anything, conceited creature! Maybe she's only dead to you. Hello, Puppazina, Puppazina!

PUPPAZINA. [*Opening her door*] Come in, kind gentlemen. How glad I am to see you!

[HARLEQUIN *and* PUNCH *go in.*]

PUNCH. [*Entering last*] Dead! The absurd little man!

PIERROT. [*Lamenting*] Nothing any longer exists! Nothing any longer exists! Even death itself is a dream . . . and it alone remained to me as a refuge. . . . O Death, Death, which I awaited as the last embrace of all, art thou too an illusion? Woe, woe! Is rest nowhere to be found?

[*As he thus moans, the second door on the left is opened. A tall white figure comes out of it and gently approaches him.*]

THE WHITE FIGURE. Pierrot . . . Pierrot . . .

[*Silence.*]

Pierrot!

PIERROT. Who calls me so sweetly?

THE WHITE FIGURE. Pierrot, do not believe in those puppets. Rest still exists.

PIERROT. Rest . . .

THE WHITE FIGURE. To sleep, to think no more, to remember no more . . . and regret no more! Come with me, Pierrot: I am eternal peace.

PIERROT. [*Without looking, raising himself like a somnambulist*] Yes, yes, your voice is sweet and your words alluring. I will follow you. It is as if I had long desired you . . . Where have I seen you before?

THE WHITE FIGURE. Follow me, Pierrot, without asking who I am. . . .

PIERROT. Enough that you console me . . . But are you really not an illusion, like the others? Is it not Puppazina hidden beneath your robe? Is it really not you, Columbine, who have returned to mock me?

THE WHITE FIGURE. Follow me, Pierrot; accept me without knowing me.

PIERROT. No, no! I have been duped once too often. I will not follow you without first seeing your face.

THE WHITE FIGURE. Follow me, Pierrot, without troubling yourself about my face. . . .

PIERROT. No, no. Whether you are deceitful or not, I will see your face! Who are you? Who are you?

[THE WHITE FIGURE, *after a slight hesitation, draws aside its veil and reveals the grinning skull of* DEATH.]

PIERROT. [*Recoiling violently*] Oh, merciful heavens! Away from me! Away! Leave me! [*In wild terror, he falls to his knees.*] O Moon, my mother, by whose light this horrible face has been revealed to me, save me, save me from the embrace of Death's bony arms!

DEATH. [*Drawing apart and returning to his door*] Do not fear me, Pierrot. I thought you desired me to come. I went out of my way to come to you. I was doing you a favor, for your hour had not yet struck. . . . [*He passes near* THE OLD MAN, *who salutes him in a neighborly fashion.*]

THE OLD MAN. Good-evening, neighbor. Are you not coming to visit me yet?

DEATH. No, my friend. You don't fear me? Did you not see how frightened this child was?

THE OLD MAN. He is indeed but a child. He is not prepared to welcome you as you should be welcomed.

DEATH. And you?

THE OLD MAN. When you want my old body, you are welcome to it. Is it now? I am ready.

DEATH. Not yet. Everyone has his hour. Await me patiently.

THE OLD MAN. When you will.

[DEATH *enters his own door.* THE OLD MAN *approaches* PIERROT, *who is cringing and choking with fright.*]

THE OLD MAN. Why don't you listen to what I say?

PIERROT. What did you say?

THE OLD MAN. We must love even our sorrows.

PIERROT. Love . . . even one's betrayal?

THE OLD MAN. We must fix in our memories the most beautiful moments of joy we have experienced, and cast away the memories which destroy one. . . .

PIERROT. My memory is an abyss of sorrow—and I cannot master my thoughts.

THE OLD MAN. You must learn to master them. Happiness is the science of memory.

PIERROT. Oh, stop talking! You are too old. Nothing touches you any longer, nothing disturbs you. Why, did I not hear you hobnobbing even with that horrible specter?

THE OLD MAN. Death is one's last friend. The only one that accepts us as we are, knowing all. But I understand you. My voice no longer has the inflection which can influence you at your age. I will call my young cousin.

PIERROT. Some fresh fool!

THE OLD MAN. He is a singer and a poet. I love him. Even when he weeps, he smiles.

PIERROT. More incoherence!

THE OLD MAN. Are you the one to talk of reasoning, Pierrot?

PIERROT. I don't care about reasoning. But as everybody deceives me, for goodness' sake leave me in peace to my misery.

THE OLD MAN. Do you still seek the wherewithal to soften your despair? All is not yet lost, Pierrot.

PIERROT. All is lost, save my sorrow.

THE OLD MAN. *Love* your sorrow! Do you not owe it to a woman whom you love?

PIERROT. Alas!

THE OLD MAN. [*To* THE YOUNG MAN *who opens third door back stage right*] Ah, my friend, I wanted to see you. Among all your dreams, have you no remedy that will dissipate a love-sorrow?

THE YOUNG MAN. There is no such thing as a love-sorrow. Nothing could be more untrue! Where love exists, sorrow cannot exist.

THE OLD MAN. Do you hear, Pierrot?

PIERROT. [*Addressing the audience*] Another fine purveyor of flapdoodle!

THE YOUNG MAN. You are unfair. So it is you who think you are suffering? How old are you, Pierrot?

PIERROT. A hundred years . . . a thousand years . . . I am no age.

THE OLD MAN. He must be very young to joke about the years like that!

THE YOUNG MAN. You are twenty, and you complain that you are suffering on account of love?

PIERROT. Good heavens! I suppose you think I ought to be pleased about it.

THE YOUNG MAN. She has deceived you?

PIERROT. That is my business.

THE OLD MAN. Only just now he was making an outcry about it. It seems his sorrow is abating.

THE YOUNG MAN. She has deceived you. To her you owe your unhappiness. Do you owe nothing else to her?

PIERROT. That is quite enough.

THE YOUNG MAN. Don't laugh. Do you not owe to her a thousand joys which you never take into account? Oh, witless child, who live only for the moment! Your life does not consist of one solitary moment. It is woven of a thousand moments. In remembering only the unpleasant hours which you owe to Columbine you are unfair to her.

What of the matchless hours she gave you?

And what about those past joys which will adorn your life like blossoms on a tree, when later on you come to think about them?

PIERROT. The tree is dead!

THE YOUNG MAN. The world is living! The tree will live again! Let everything have its right place! Don't let one moment of your life swell so large that it stifles all the others! So you think the world is merely the image of Columbine?

PIERROT. It is!

THE YOUNG MAN. Child! What was it six months ago?

PIERROT. It was . . .

THE YOUNG MAN. Well?

PIERROT. It was not the face of any woman.

THE YOUNG MAN. The world has a hundred faces—a thousand faces! We must love them all, and not, in our foolishness, let one hide all the rest. One aspect of the world is not enough for a whole life. You must look upon them all, innumerable and beautiful, returning smiles for your smiles. . . .

Think of spring mornings, Pierrot, those fine spring mornings flooded with sunshine and musical with the hum of insects, when the blue of the sky is so fresh that one wants to plunge into it! Think of noons spent by the sea, of days in the forest! Dream of the friend that you love! Dream of the hundred aspects of the world—of the aspects you know and of the aspects you do not yet know. Dream of all that lives, of the world as it rolls beneath the Milky Way, of the great heavens made up of infinite worlds, where your mother, the moon, looks down on you, peacefully, tranquilly, sweetly, because she has seen so much. . . .

Behold, absorb, enjoy! The whole world offers itself to you. And in your folly, you reject it!

The clouds are mute in this nocturnal splendor. The silence is sonorous with stellar music—and you stand there, cast down by a trivial incident, and your stupidity deprives it even of the beauty it has. . . .

You are a child, Pierrot. . . .

PIERROT. The night is great and beautiful . . . but I am so small!

THE OLD MAN. Fasten your memory to this night. Harmonize this pure image of the universe with the image which you fancy you hate. Nothing is hateful, Pierrot: listen to what the night itself has to say about it!

THE YOUNG MAN. The day and the night are full of love. Love streams over us endlessly, like wind playing through our hair. Rise up! Look! How can your eyes blind themselves with tears when there are so many beauties to absorb?

PIERROT. So many beauties!

THE OLD MAN. Everything is beautiful, until death. Everything one touches responds with love, if only our eyes love beauty and our soul is hungry for love.

THE YOUNG MAN. The soul that is hungry for happiness draws joy irresistibly to it! The man who gives way to his trouble is like a stump of wood which decays in the bed of the river, over which the water bounds happily to the sea. Pull yourself together, Pierrot! Look life in the face. If your trouble obsesses you, change it, transfigure it, transform it into a love which will pardon the hate which is now killing you. Come with me. We will enter my house and there take refreshment. I will sing songs which I have made to the glory of the world! And we will find in your sorrow that which will transmute it into joy.

The everlasting door is open before you, revealing an endless vista. Come with me, we will seek together. Spleen is barren. True sorrow contains within itself a germ of joy. Let us see if your sorrow is a fruitful sorrow.

Tell me all about it. . . .

[*They enter* THE YOUNG MAN'S *house, while* PIERROT *commences to narrate.*]

PIERROT. No eyes could be bluer than hers . . .

CURTAIN

DAGGERS AND DIAMONDS[1]

BY

KATHARINE PRESCOTT MOSELEY

Katharine Prescott Moseley considers Newburyport, Massachusetts, her home. While her accomplishments as an author have distinction, yet her name has not appeared on the title-pages of many books of plays. Now, more than formerly, she is turning attention to creative writing for the theater.

Daggers and Diamonds is a satirical travesty, in which the dramatic contrast is struck between the restraint of aristocratic tradition and all that is untutored and untrammeled in the present. In this battle of wits between an accomplished nobleman and a beautiful, if unwashed, woman Bolshevist, who forgets humanitarianism under the lure of beautiful clothes and good society, Miss Moseley handles radicalism with shrewdness, insight, and artistry.

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CHARACTERS

The Prince
Sophie
Madame Rosita
Oliver

DAGGERS AND DIAMONDS

SCENE: *A salon in the Château Zabarau. On one side of the room is an open grand piano. Over the fireplace is the portrait of a handsome woman of the early eighteenth century. At the back of the room large glass doors give an outlook on a beautiful and very formal garden.*

[*Enter* OLIVER, *left. He wears the livery of a footman, knee breeches, powdered hair, etc. He carries a small red trunk, studded with large brass-headed nails. He is followed by* MADAME ROSITA, *in a housekeeper's black dress. She wears over her head something in the nature of a black mantilla. She walks slowly and rather solemnly behind him. Taking a bunch of large keys from her,* OLIVER *opens the trunk. He throws up his hands in admiration of its contents, and exits right, without having spoken.* MADAME ROSITA, *kneeling on the floor, looks over the contents of the trunk. She takes out ornaments, a wreath of artificial flowers, a fan, etc. With each article she takes out she looks up at the portrait to compare it with the articles represented there. They are identical. Finally she rises, and, taking out a beautiful robe of brocade, she holds it up to compare it with the one in the portrait; it also is identical with the gown of the portrait. A young man appears on the terrace outside the glass doors. Without seeing him,* MADAME ROSITA *is looking about to find a place to conceal a large jewel-box she has just taken from the trunk. At last she places it behind one of the vases on the mantelpiece. The young man stands looking in on her smilingly for a moment, then, throwing open the glass doors, which remain open, he enters. At sight of him* MADAME ROSITA *starts.*]

MADAME ROSITA. Ah, Monsieur le Prince—a thousand pardons. For an instant I did not see that it was Monsieur. Is it true that Monsieur desires to see the costume that the great-aunt of Mon-

sieur wore at the grand ball given at the time of the accession of his late Majesty to the throne?

PRINCE. Yes, Madame Rosita. I hope, however, that I have put you to no inconvenience in this matter. There is, as you know, very little to amuse one at the Château Zabarau, at this moment—or any other—and I have heard that such a costume existed; in fact, that it was modeled on the dress worn by Madame Eulalia, in the famous painting that hangs there.

MADAME ROSITA. [*Holding up the gown*] As you see, Monsieur, it is a precise copy.

PRINCE. [*Examining it with his hands*] How little time has defaced it! Ah, how lovely! It makes one pensive, indeed, to think of all the dear dead women of whom the poet sings. [*He stoops and picks up the fan.*] And this was the fan. [*Compares it with the picture.*] And this, the wreath of flowers,—yes,—I feel chilly and grown old.

MADAME ROSITA. Ah, yes, Monsieur, those were the days in which to have lived—is it not true? [*She sighs.*] Shall I put them all away again, Monsieur?

PRINCE. No, leave them here for a bit. I like to look at them. [*He stands looking down into the trunk.*] A desperate situation for a man, Madame Rosita, when he has to turn to his great-aunt's old ball-gowns for feminine society?

MADAME ROSITA. [*After an instant, in which she looks at him, smiling, she suddenly grows serious and speaks in a mysterious voice.*] Monsieur le Prince—

PRINCE. [*Looking at her, quickly*] What is it, Madame Rosita?

MADAME ROSITA. I have found something more; something that is not a copy made from the portrait, but the very original—

PRINCE. You mean the diamond necklace. [*Makes a motion towards the portrait.*]

MADAME ROSITA. Did Monsieur know that they also were in the trunk?

PRINCE. I knew they must be somewhere in the world.

MADAME ROSITA. It is unsafe, Monsieur—unsafe. Some day

another great lady will wear these stones; is it not so, Monsieur? [*As she speaks, she takes the box from its hiding-place and, opening it, lifts out the necklace.*] Ah-h,—Monsieur, Monsieur! Are they not glorious?

PRINCE. Yes, very nice,—very nice, indeed. Leave it in the trunk, Madame Rosita, and when I go to town I will see that they are taken to the safety vaults.

MADAME ROSITA. [*Dusting the trunk*] Are there any further orders from Monsieur?

PRINCE. No, Madame Rosita, unless you would perhaps play a duet with me,

[MADAME ROSITA *throws up her hands in protest.*]

or, by your prayers, bring back those ancient days when we were something more than names.

MADAME ROSITA. Ah, Monsieur, [*She shrugs her shoulders.*] they live only in such fair and faded things as these [*She takes one article after another and lays them in the trunk.*], in the stale odors [*She sways the fan before her face.*] of old fans, and the dim tints of old brocades. [*She lays the robe lightly on top of all.*] And now I go, Monsieur. [*She makes a curtsy to him, he bows in return, and she exits, left.*]

[*He turns idly towards the piano, and, after turning over several sheets and books of music, he seats himself listlessly and begins trying over various pieces of the eighteenth century. He glances over his shoulder as he plays.*]

PRINCE. Ah, she danced to this. Yes, Madame, it was written for the steps of ladies such as you. I know by your look it was one of your favorites. And old Rameau, did you know him, I wonder? Rosita was wrong; it is in its music that a bygone day still lives. [*Breaks off suddenly and begins to play the gavotte from the second act of* "Tosca."]

[*Enter* OLIVER, *left.*]

OLIVER. Monsieur le Prince, a lady wishes to see you.

PRINCE. [*Turning excitedly on the music bench*] A lady here at the Château Zabarau—on this dull day of our Lord. Show her in at once, by all means.

OLIVER. She says, Monsieur—

PRINCE. Oliver! Why do you hesitate?

OLIVER. She says, Monsieur, that she has come to kill you!

PRINCE. In that case, show her in immediately. Battle, murder, and sudden death, any of them is preferable to the peace of the Château Zabarau.

OLIVER. I fear, Monsieur le Prince, that she is a very dangerous young woman.

PRINCE. Dangerous? How do you mean?

OLIVER. Dirty, Monsieur.

PRINCE. Ah, [*Turning back to the piano*] you disappoint me, Oliver. To be killed by a lovely patriot, in a creation designed for the occasion by Paquin, something modeled on the style of *les incroyables*, such as Charlotte Corday might have put on to pay her call on Marat, or Madame Roland, when she uttered her famous remark on Liberty,—but there's something sordid—really objectionable—about being murdered by an untidy young woman, don't you think? Besides, as you say, there are possibilities of infection in dirt that may lead to serious consequences,—even to death, Oliver.

OLIVER. If I may say so, Monsieur, it is quite evident that murder in the first degree—not the second—is the young woman's intention.

PRINCE. Whether her intentions are good or bad, honorable or otherwise, Oliver,—I don't think she'll pave hell with this Prince,—so show her in, this minute.

[*Enter* SOPHIE, *left, her hair and dress in disarray, ferocity in her eye, a knife in the bodice of her dress. The* PRINCE *has turned again to the piano and is touching the keys. As she enters, his back is half turned towards her, and she puts her hand savagely on the hilt of the knife, then hesitates as he speaks.*]

PRINCE. [*Rising and bowing ceremoniously*] Ah, Mademoiselle, it gives me pleasure to receive you at this moment; your coming is

indeed opportune, for by your face I know that you are of a race that has music at its finger-tips, and this duet by Rameau is what I want of all things. [*He moves over to the piano.*] It was rather extraordinary, but just a moment before Oliver came to announce your arrival, suddenly, following some impulse, I broke from the little piece of Couperin I was playing and began the air, don't you know,—like this [*He sits down and begins to play the gavotte, speaking as he plays.*]—in the manner of the eighteenth century, that Puccini so cleverly, with such a sense of the drama, introduced into that bloody scene from Tosca.

SOPHIE. [*Who has crept nearer each moment, watching him closely, crouching panther-like, with her dagger ready, and about to strike*] And every Red from here to Moscow shall know tonight how well their comrade played her part!

PRINCE. [*He lifts her arm lightly in carelessly warding off her blow, but it is evident that it is his coolness rather than physical force that disarms her.*] Yes, your part's in the bass [*He indicates the lower keys with his other hand.*]—just here—don't you see—just here. Ah, how well ordered they were! How symmetrical the work of the eighteenth-century composers! Like interiors planned by Oudry—and gardens planned by La Manche. [*Runs his hands over the piano, without striking the keys.*]

SOPHIE. [*Who, while he speaks, has been standing, half drawn back, one arm stretched out behind her*] I did not come here, citizen, to listen to the music of sycophants who have degraded their talents for the pleasure of kings.

PRINCE. Ah, please let us not waste time in talking politics—economics—that sort of thing. I feel that art, not statecraft, is a woman's sphere. Will you not now try this duet with me? I have even begged Madame Rosita to accompany me.

[*She moves nearer him, her hand on the dagger in her corsage.*]

Oh, but—your hands, Mademoiselle—before we play—I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle, [*Rising*] but perhaps Mademoiselle would care to be shown to a hand-basin—

SOPHIE. [*Sullenly*] They are the hands of a working-woman.

PRINCE. Ah,—they were not meant for work! But, a thousand pardons, these are the stains of travel, naturally, that Mademoiselle bears upon her person, and I have not, in all this time, offered Mademoiselle the hospitality of my house. If Mademoiselle will listen, I will make her a little confidence. This country seat was built in the early part of the eighteenth century, by a great king, for a lady who had the honor of being my progenitor.

[SOPHIE *shakes her fist at the portrait.*]

Ah, I see that Mademoiselle knows the romantic story. *Bien*,—now, while there was nothing missing that artifice could fashion of gardens, tapestries, carvings, bowers, just one thing was forgotten, and the lack was noticed, for the first time, only after more than a hundred years. In the fifth generation it fell to me to supply this ancient domicile with a bathroom—two bathrooms,—don't faint, I beg,—three bathrooms. Now, what I am leading up to, was to ask if Mademoiselle would not care to be shown to one of them, and, if the hydraulic force is not sufficient in one to remove the dust of the—yes, the dust of the road—from Mademoiselle, perhaps the united efforts of all three might accomplish a good deal.

SOPHIE. I despise the luxuries of the rich. Your bathrooms do not interest me.

PRINCE. Ah, how like Madame Eulalia!

SOPHIE. Infamous man! Do you compare me with a king's favorite?

PRINCE. No, no, my dear lady, I am not as unfilial as that. Besides, I can't see enough of you to compare you with anything.

SOPHIE. Mocker!

PRINCE. No, I am very serious. The fact is, my curiosity is excited to a degree that will soon become painful if Mademoiselle does not grant my request, of removing her—er—veil, shall we say—because I am beginning to get the impression that there is a pretty woman in the room!

SOPHIE. I did not come here to captivate but to assassinate.

PRINCE. Assassinate! Good heavens, what benefit have I ever

conferred upon mankind that I should be assassinated? But here comes Oliver to lay the cloth, so let's postpone the tragedy till after tea. Oliver will now show Mademoiselle into the hands of Madame Rosita, my housekeeper, who will assist her toilette.

SOPHIE. I will not stir.

PRINCE. Mademoiselle would grieve me if she forced me to be masterful, but I may have to remind her that she has put herself into the hands of two able-bodied men, and, with her nice sense of delicacy, I feel that possibly the escort of a lady would be more desirable.

SOPHIE. Aristocrat! I will not stir from where I stand.

PRINCE. That, Mademoiselle, is unnecessary,—for if we cannot lead Mademoiselle to water, water shall be brought to Mademoiselle. Oliver, call Madame Rosita, and ask her to bring a portable bath.

[*Exit* OLIVER, *left.*]

SOPHIE. Insult!

PRINCE. I merely arrange that the mountain shall be brought to Mahomet, if Mahomet will not go to the mountain. Could hospitality go further?

[*Enter* MADAME ROSITA, *left. She carries a bowl of old Spanish silver.* OLIVER *follows with a silver pitcher and a towel. They station themselves stiffly, side by side.*]

OLIVER. The arrangements are completed, Monsieur.

PRINCE. [*To* MADAME ROSITA] Mademoiselle says that we may lead a Bolshevik to water, but we can't make her wash!

MADAME ROSITA. I'll make her wash! [*She swings round, bringing the basin in front of* SOPHIE.] Put your dirty hands in the water, girl.

PRINCE. Put your pretty hands in the water, Mademoiselle.

[SOPHIE, *reluctantly, but persuaded by the* PRINCE'S *flattery puts her hands into the basin.*]

[*The* PRINCE *moves over to the other side of* OLIVER *as he speaks.*] Don't be too long, Mademoiselle, I beg of you, for our tea will be

too long steeped, and strong tea shatters the nerves when one has a murder on for five-thirty. [*To* OLIVER] What's the lady's name, and from where did she come?

OLIVER. We are all at a loss, Monsieur. However she got past the gates no one can fancy. We humbly apologize for her intrusion.

PRINCE. Oh, not a bit, not a bit. The devil himself would be welcome at the Château Zabarau this afternoon.

OLIVER. It is evident, Monsieur, that he has sent his nearest female relative in his place.

PRINCE. [*Whispering*] What is her name?

OLIVER. [*Also whispering*] Sophie is all I could manage, Monsieur; her last was beyond my linguistic capacity—there's a hitch or an itch at the end, if I mistake not.

[MADAME ROSITA *and* OLIVER *exit slowly, left.* SOPHIE, *having washed her face, being inspired thereto by a glance at herself in the mirror, dries it with the towel* OLIVER *has carried.*]

PRINCE. [*Very ingratiatingly*] I was right then. [*As* SOPHIE *stands still, without speaking*] So I was right,—there was a pretty woman in the room! There is a pretty woman in the room! I hope you don't find it drafty here, Mademoiselle. Now, come, let's sit down and have tea. We'll have a nice, cozy time together, and talk it all over. One or two lumps?

SOPHIE. [*She sits down on the edge of a chair, opposite him.*] Neither. Strong and clear.

PRINCE. Oh, strong and clear? [*Pours out cup and hands it to her.*] And some cake. [*Looks about the table.*] Where's the knife? Oliver forgot the knife. [*Catching sight of the knife in her bodice, as she is stealthily about to draw it upon him again.*] Oh, would you mind lending me your knife [*He reaches towards her and possesses himself of the knife.*] to cut the cake with? [*He puts the knife into the cake and then looks at her significantly as the knife cuts very sharply.*] That's a very good knife. [*He pauses.*] Sophie, do you know I'm rather glad I'm not that cake—or that the cake is not me.

SOPHIE. [*In a sepulchral voice*] Yes, it is a good knife.

PRINCE. Oh! [*Feeling the edge of it*] A very good pruning knife, Sophie—what? I suppose your idea was to prune off a worthless limb from my family tree, Sophie? Try a little bit of this cake. I'm very fond of my tea at this hour. It's a habit I picked up in England. Do you know England?

SOPHIE. No, but I know its beastly offspring.

PRINCE. Really! You mean—?

SOPHIE. America.

PRINCE. America? But I fancied that America was the haven of—of what you described yourself as being.

SOPHIE. The framers of the American constitution did not understand the psychology of the Slavic working-girl!

PRINCE. [*Dropping his hands, with the knife, on the table*] *Nom de Dieu!* Mademoiselle, I think you have made an unanswerable statement.

SOPHIE. [*Nodding her head*] What did those ice-bound, snow-bound, frostbitten Puritans—pouff!—know of the fire, the temperament, the idealism, of—

PRINCE. [*Demurely*] You should pity, not blame, them, Mademoiselle, as I do. No doubt, if they had had my opportunities of studying into this fascinating subject, they might have been as interested as I find myself becoming. We are all human.

SOPHIE. Monsieur laughs at the poor, brave girl who carries her scythe to make of mankind one even growth of stubble fields. [*She makes a low, level motion with her hand.*] The heroine who smarts under the wrongs of a common brotherhood.

PRINCE. Yes, I do—of course. Has that dawned upon you? Besides, you're not a heroine. You know you haven't killed me yet. Instead of being a heroine, you're merely—

SOPHIE. [*Impulsively*] Ah, Monsieur himself is a brave man. I admit as much, for if it had not been so he would not have turned his back on this furious daughter of the people while he played [*She makes the motions with her fingers.*] the little tinkling piece of the eighteenth century upon the piano.

PRINCE. As I was saying, your most conspicuous characteristic is—shall I go on?

SOPHIE. If you choose.

PRINCE. Why, it's simply vanity—of course—

SOPHIE. Vanity? She who would have immolated herself upon the altar of the downtrodden?

PRINCE. Martyrs are all egotists—the greatest on earth—surely, my dear lady, you know that? Laying oneself down upon an altar! Rather not,—setting oneself up on it as its only original deity. You mark me! Let me take Mademoiselle's cup. [*He pours out another cup.*] A little sugar this time, my dear goddess? [*He drops a lump into the cup and hands it to her.*]

SOPHIE. [*She drinks her tea quickly and rises, looking about her.*] I have more than one duty to execute [*She hisses the word.*] during my visit upon you, citizen. [*She moves about, fingering bric-à-brac and books on their shelves.*]

[*During the following conversation between them the* PRINCE *and* SOPHIE *watch each other always closely and furtively.*]

PRINCE. Ah-h—I understand! A little inventory for the use of your friends on some future occasion?

SOPHIE. You have guessed, Monsieur.

PRINCE. Pardon, but it is not safe to rely upon one's memory in these affairs. [*He goes to a desk and takes from it a pad and pencil, which he hands her.*] Allow me. You will observe that Madame Eulalia saw to it that her household was well instructed in theological matters. Is Mademoiselle interested in books about saints and martyrs—

SOPHIE. Bah, Monsieur, for me, I should say they are all damn dull! Ugh! But does an enthusiast act from personal inclination? —tell me that—tell me that.

PRINCE. Sophie, I'll tell you nothing. Time will tell us all we wish to know—and a lot we don't—for it always does—it always does.

SOPHIE. It is easy to see that Monsieur has no ideals. [*Aside*] Books—books—books—bah!

PRINCE. Now, please do not misunderstand me. Personally, I have the highest regard for martyrs, and—other egotists. The race only exists at all by hanging on to their skirts. But they don't belong—not the very least in the world—to your scheme of society. They simply don't exist in a plan that is laid out on any dead level. Scratch a martyr, Sophie, and you'll find an aristocrat. We mere hereditary princes are simply nowhere beside them.

SOPHIE. [*In scorn*] Monsieur knows nothing. He is an excrescence.

PRINCE. Do you know, I feel that our conversation has at last become personal, even intimate, almost tender.

SOPHIE. Monsieur knows nothing of those ideals in which we [*Tapping her chest*]—we, the superior ones, exert our genius and our courage [*She hesitates an instant as he looks at her satirically.*] for the common good, demanding no material rewards in this world—

PRINCE. Surely, you don't expect them from the next world, Sophie. Sophie, be prudent and don't confuse the products of the two localities. You'd better take your material rewards,—if you can get them,—from the one that can deliver the goods. Will you now, please, confide in me as to—how you came here?

SOPHIE. Through mud and mire.

PRINCE. I guessed that. But did you come alone?

SOPHIE. No, I did not come alone.

PRINCE. Oh, I say, what a lazy brute! Why didn't you make him come in and kill me?

SOPHIE. It was a woman.

PRINCE. [*Joyously*] What, another one? Did she want to assassinate me, too?

SOPHIE. Poltroon! She failed.

PRINCE. You shouldn't be too hard on her for that. What is her name?

SOPHIE. Her name is Marcia. When she saw your palaces, your gardens, your manservants, her miserable heart misgave her.

PRINCE. It's all a matter of degree, you see. You went a step farther, but—

SOPHIE. I am like the Ides of March, Monsieur. I have come, but I have not gone.

PRINCE. No, now you're here, Sophie, I wouldn't listen to it—not for a moment. We haven't even tried our duet yet. But now, tell me what did you two girls want to assassinate me for? I'm no one in particular. Why didn't you choose some of my cousins? There are a number of them—kings in perfectly good and regular standing.

SOPHIE. Because you have no right to exist. Your noblesse is derived from the woman who hangs there,—a king's favorite.

PRINCE. [*Looking at the portrait*] Oh, yes—you know I was just thinking—it just occurred to me—that she must have been just about such a woman as you—full of go, and good looks, and interest in persons of degree. [*Still looking up at the picture*] To be sure, she did not lay aside the rewards of her initiative—she discounted celestial rewards for cash, it is true—and she chose to draw a prince's attention with a nosegay rather than a dagger—but, listen, I wish to tell you something—

SOPHIE. [*Interrupting*] Her motives were—personal; mine are—pure!

PRINCE. Methods change, not motives, Sophie.

SOPHIE. What did she ever do in the interest of her human kind? [*Aside and examining two vases of Sèvres*] Two China vases!

PRINCE. You'd not ask that, Sophie, if you knew her history. When she became the uncrowned wife of the king, her womanly ascendancy over him was so great that he had at least [*He makes motion as if counting on his fingers.*] ten thousand persons put to death who disagreed with her in spiritual affairs; perhaps even more. Oh, yes, she too had ideas of social regeneration. If she'd lived in our day, they'd certainly—yes, they'd certainly have called her an uplifter!

SOPHIE. Why should not this daughter of the people have worn a crown?

PRINCE. Now, I might possibly complain on that score, but why should you? If you're so insatiably ambitious as that, why didn't you make an attempt on the life of our sovereign?

SOPHIE. He has one wife, and morganatic connection, such as you suggest, would not establish the principle for which I might be willing to sacrifice myself, that a peasant is a fitting wife for a king.

PRINCE. [*Looking at her steadily for a moment*] Sophie, it is evident that even if your methods are bizarre, your instincts are in the right place. [*He pauses.*] But, were you really laboring under the delusion that my ancestor, Madame Eulalia, was a morganatic wife? Not in the least. The king was a widower, and Madame Eulalia was duly married to him—and by the Church. Oh, rather! She was a lady of the most impeccable virtue—as soon as she found it in the least practical.—You don't think any but a good woman would have persecuted ten thousand persons for their souls' sake, do you?

SOPHIE. If she was married by the Church, why was she not crowned?

PRINCE. Why? Oh, because your friends, the masses, will not allow that.

SOPHIE. The masses? But she was of them.

PRINCE. That's the reason.

SOPHIE. It is your wretched order that fears to lose its caste.

PRINCE. Whom do we fear?

SOPHIE. [*Striking her chest*] Us!

PRINCE. Exactly. How long would you sing "Long live the Queen" to your next-door neighbor;—Marcia, for instance?

SOPHIE. [*She makes a grimace.*] Marcia!

PRINCE. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] Marcia! Yes, precisely. Kings know that it is their remoteness alone that you respect. Don't you suppose that almost any old king would like to pay a pretty girl with a hoe, or a rake, or a dagger, or something of the sort, who showed an interest in him, the compliment of making her his queen? But you and your friends won't let him.

SOPHIE. Yes, you are but the quicksilver in the glass. We are the climate.

PRINCE. Certainly, Sophie; what more do you want? When you are warm, we go up.

SOPHIE. And when we are cold, you go down.

PRINCE. Precisely. By the way, speaking of Marcia, let's have Marcia in and give her a cup of tea. I'll ring and tell Oliver to find her. [*He rises and makes a motion toward the bell-rope.*]

SOPHIE. [*In a high, shrill voice*] No-o!

PRINCE. What? Why not?

SOPHIE. Marcia is not intended for the drawing-room.

PRINCE. Oh! And what makes you think you are?

SOPHIE. Because I am here.

PRINCE. Ah, Mademoiselle, that is a perfectly sound philosophy, if somewhat at variance with your earlier doctrine.

SOPHIE. Yes, I am here.

PRINCE. Oh, I follow you—quite—quite. You are here because you are, by nature, more highly endowed with the initiative that Marcia lacks; because, in short, you, of all your sisters, had the courage to approach high places, and so, naturally, have a right to keep them to yourself.

SOPHIE. Exactly, Monsieur.

PRINCE. But—I thought you came here—I mean you thought you came here—not for personal aggrandizement, but in pursuance of that large humanitarian scheme whereby the inept shall inherit the earth.

SOPHIE. That a new day shall dawn, rising blood-red from the east.

PRINCE. In your own lofty words, that you had brought your scythe in prosecution of a plan to trim mankind into one level growth of stubble fields.

SOPHIE. [*Aside*] The idea is sublime!

PRINCE. Sophie, those who try to make this world a stubble field may—reap themselves a bed of straw.

[SOPHIE *makes it evident that she is paying no heed to his last remarks; she pauses in making her inventory; her eye has fallen on the ancient finery; with great interest and with now a growing air of actual jealous ferocity, she glances from the box to the portrait.*]

I fear that my words of wisdom have fallen on inattentive ears. I

see that at last your eye has fallen upon something that possibly attracts you, that you are comparing the gown worn by my great-aunt at the court of his late Majesty with that worn by the Favorite in an earlier century, of which it is an exact copy.

[SOPHIE, *catlike, moves forward, smoldering rage in every movement.*]

SOPHIE. There are jewels there.

PRINCE. Yes, there are jewels there. [*He also moves toward the box.*]

SOPHIE. They are not yours. You have no right to call them yours.

PRINCE. Not bad loot, I suppose you think, for your friends, some day, Sophie?

SOPHIE. [*Looking into the box, and barely resisting the impulse to grasp the jewels. She speaks with an air of grim acquisitiveness.*] First come, first served!

PRINCE. I agree with you, my dear lady, one possession is worth all the nine points of a radical's law.

[*Suddenly, as if maddened by the sight of the riches,* SOPHIE *springs to where the dagger has been lying. She plunges towards the* PRINCE, *who holds in one hand the wreath that he has taken from the box. In the real struggle that follows,* SOPHIE'S *hair falls about her shoulders, at the same moment that the* PRINCE *wrests the dagger from her.*]

What lovely hair. Ah, just a twist [*He suits the action to his words.*] and it would be like hers. [*He glances at the portrait.*] Allow me. Now, like this,—it is quite simple. [*He thrusts the blade into her hair as a pin. She struggles furiously, but every movement pulls her hair. Suddenly he lets go, holding a diamond bracelet toward her; he speaks very gently.*] It is not as difficult as that, Sophie.

[SOPHIE *looks at him with surprise and eagerness, her whole aspect becoming transformed.*]

See! I give it to you.

SOPHIE. Mine?

PRINCE. [*He takes her arm, which she has stretched towards him.*] Wait a moment; the spring is rusty. [*While he clasps the bracelet on her arm she turns and looks, with almost childish longing, at the box.*] Now, the wreath. [*He takes it from his arm, where it has been hanging. He looks at her, flirtatiously, and pauses an instant before arranging it on her head at the same angle as that at which that of the Favorite is worn.*]

[SOPHIE *catches sight of herself in the glass and touches the wreath, with evident enjoyment.*]

SOPHIE. Mine?

PRINCE. Yes, Mademoiselle Sophie, yours. [*He moves over to the trunk and she follows. He now takes from the trunk one article after another and hands them to her.*] Her pomander.

SOPHIE. Mine?

PRINCE. Yes, Mademoiselle, yours. The other diamond bracelet —[*He hands it to her.*]

SOPHIE. Mine?

PRINCE. Yes, Sophie, yours. Her chatelaine—[*He hands it to her.*]

SOPHIE. Mine—[*She draws a little breath of delight.*]

PRINCE. There is still more, Mademoiselle. [*He lifts out the jewel-box and, opening it, displays the diamond necklace.*]

SOPHIE. Oh-h! [*She draws a deep breath.*]

PRINCE. Yes, this, too, is the original. Do you know, Sophie,—I thought it would be rather nice—I am sure you will agree with me—to give this little trinket to Marcia—poor Marcia. I mean to say, she's had a fearfully tiresome hot journey—all that sort of thing—for nothing—and I have given you all these other things—It's rather hard on poor Marcia.

SOPHIE. [*Coldly*] Justice is hard.

PRINCE. That's why we try to help it out with a little charity. There is a sort of *noblesse oblige* to help those who can't help themselves. We of the older order feel that.

SOPHIE. [*In a high, shrill voice, and with an air of primitive simplicity*] No-o!

PRINCE. Sophie, you remind me that there are two ages in the life of man. The first [*He counts them off on his fingers.*], when he has gained no possessions, and is awfully—quixotically—generous with them. Marcia's in that stage. The second, where he has gained them, and means to keep them—you're in that stage.

SOPHIE. And the third, where he's had them so long that he's forgotten what it is to be without them and is quite ready to hand them over to the first-comer. That is your condition. [*During this time* SOPHIE *has been rummaging the box.*]

PRINCE. [*Holding up the necklace*] Think well, Sophie, shall I send for Marcia?

SOPHIE. [*Again in a high, shrill voice*] No-o—

PRINCE. But, my dear girl, I am giving you an opportunity, such as precious few of your friends will ever possess, to put your theories in practice.

SOPHIE. Marcia has not the endowment of boldness and strategy that is mine.

PRINCE. And should she be penalized for what is clearly not her fault, and you rewarded with diamond necklaces for being born with superior talents? I fancied that you pined to achieve only to hand over the spoils to the incapable.

SOPHIE. [*As if lost to a sense of anything but her new possessions*] No-o-o.

PRINCE. Ah, I begin, at last, to—to understand. How dull of me! Mademoiselle has been speaking all this time, of course, in the exalted terms of the abstract. [*He holds up the necklace.*] Allow me,—like this,—see! After all, one cannot expect philosophy from princes. [*He clasps the necklace about her neck.*] Now there's only one thing lacking [*As she turns and looks about her*]. What are you looking for? Your scythe? Are you looking for your scythe? [*He makes a motion indicating that the dagger is in her hair.*] A useful ornament, for the hair, Sophie, is it not? Oh, pardon! The fan! [*He picks it up from the table and hands it to her.*]

SOPHIE. The robe?

PRINCE. Yes, the robe.

SOPHIE. I will put it on.

PRINCE. As you like.

[SOPHIE *puts her arms into the robe, moves to the mirror, and then fastens the girdle about her waist. The* PRINCE *saunters over to the glass doors and looks out for a few minutes, as if in search of someone.* SOPHIE *regards him suspiciously for an instant, then moves so that they come face to face.*]

And now, Mademoiselle, are you ready to try the little pieces of Couperin—Lully—Rameau? It should have been a spinet to have finished the picture, but we must content ourselves. [*They seat themselves at the piano and strike a chord.*]

[*Just after they have done so,* OLIVER *enters for the tea tray.*]

SOPHIE. [*Suddenly breaking off and rising. She speaks with authority.*] Oliver, if you find a vagrant stealing about these premises, [*She makes a motion with her hand, indicating disparagement.*] chase her off. She's—no—good!

[OLIVER *bows and exits, left, with tray.*]

[SOPHIE *seats herself again, and they begin to play a gay piece of the eighteenth century.*]

PRINCE. [*Leaning back and looking over his shoulder at the portrait*] The dear ladies, how adaptable they are! [*He looks from* SOPHIE *to the portrait.*] Perfect in every particular. [*They play the piece. Just before they stop playing*]

CURTAIN

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDYING THE ONE-ACT PLAY

These suggestions for studying the one-act play are intended to show you how to get the most in enjoyment and in understanding from your classroom study of the plays. How to produce and how to write one-act plays are other interesting phases of the subject, but they are purposely not taken up here. Of course it is expected that you will act portions of many of the plays before the class, for without such acting your study would be largely theoretical. But this sort of dramatic reading has little to do with setting, costumes, lighting, properties, and the rest.

Theme of the Play

Every one-act play has a central theme or idea back of it. The theme may be, as in *Wanderlust*, that ambition for social and material advancement excludes the attainment of the higher, more important values of life ; it may be, as in *The Dweller in the Darkness*, the fact that spiritual beings surround us and are hurt by our disbelief in them. After you have studied a play at home write out in a sentence or two the theme of the drama. Read this to the class next day.

A theme suitable for a one-act play has certain outstanding characteristics.

1. It is single in its effect. Like the short story, the one-act play is intended to be read through at one sitting. Therefore it should deal with only one incident, the movement of which is crescendo; that is, one cause brings about a chain of events leading to a definite climax and conclusion.

2. It contains a dramatic conflict. A one-act play must contain two opposing forces, one of which triumphs over the other. The two opposing forces may be two sets of characters of opposite natures and desires, as in *Peggy*; or the two opposing forces may be within one character, as in Uncle Jimmy in the play by that name. Be able to state definitely the two contending forces in the play you are studying.

3. It is credible. Ask yourself as you are reading the play, "Could this really have happened ?" Of course plays based on fancy and romance must not be held up to this rigid standard of possibility in our

everyday world. Do the themes of such plays seem possible in the realm of fairies, of spirits, and the like? Or do they seem absurd, out of place, incongruous?

4. It is satisfying. When the play is over are you satisfied? This does not mean do you wish the play had turned out differently; but are all the mysteries cleared up, is the ending logical, is it convincing, conclusive? Are there any threads left hanging which should have been woven into the climax or the conclusion?

5. It is, from the standpoint of stagecraft, practical. Unless it can be effectively produced on the stage it has failed of its purpose.

Atmosphere

Does the play stir your feelings? What does it make you feel? There must be an underlying emotion or atmosphere which helps produce that singleness of effect so necessary to the one-act play. *The Kelly Kid* makes you laugh with delight at the humor of the situation and at the dialogue; *The Dweller in the Darkness* makes you creep with the mystery of the unknown; *Dawn* leaves you awe-stricken. What is the underlying emotion of the play you are studying?

Plot

Read over the statement you have written as to what constitutes the theme of the play you are studying. This more or less abstract theme has to be made concrete by means of a plot. The theme has no plot, no characters, no setting; it is an ethical truth maybe, with no flesh and bones. The plot makes the theme concrete, makes it live in the characters with which it is invested. For example, the theme of *'Lijah* may be phrased as pride of race. The plot is the story of a Southern gentleman who, having lost his money, tries to keep up appearances before two guests from the North by the invention of a fictitious negro servant 'Lijah. All the work that is supposed to be done by 'Lijah is in reality done by the old gentleman himself.

Is the plot well suited to bring out the theme? Write in a few sentences the outline of another plot which might have been used effectively to bring out the same theme. Write a précis (summary) of the play. In a one-act play the plot is usually more important than the characters, for in such a limited space there is little chance for character development. In the play you are studying is the plot more important than the characters? The plot best suited to a one-act play is one that produces a strong single effect, that creates an atmosphere. A play must not preach

through the speeches of its characters; it must make its theme convincing by action.

A careful study of plot makes many points in the play clearer. Why does a character leave the stage at a particular moment? Why does another enter? What is the final point toward which the whole drama is working, the climax? Notice the situations put in for contrast. Do incidents follow one another in such a way that they seem real? Is the plot true to life? artificial? built up of the stuff dreams are made of? Make a list of the lines in which the dramatist foreshadows an event to come. Are these hints easily understood? Why do not the characters understand them as well as the audience?

Each play must have an introductory part, no matter how brief, to explain the situation or the characters before the real action begins. How has the dramatist made plain to you what happened in the story before the play began? Did he show skill in selecting the point in the story at which he makes his play begin? Write a brief summary of what took place before the play opens. Be able to tell definitely where this introductory matter ends. Is it too short? too long? In the main part of the play come the struggle and the climax. Is there too much suspense? enough? Point out the climax. Is the climax a logical outcome of the conflict? Where does the body of the play end? The one-act play ends with a short conclusion, usually showing the effect of the climax on the characters. Is it too short? too abrupt? dramatic enough? satisfying? Does the end of the play end the story?

Characters

In a one-act play there is not much chance for character development; each character has to go on pretty much as you see him at the beginning. In the limited space of a one-act play most dramatists find that the character with a single dominant trait is most effective. What is the dominant trait of the leading characters in the play you are reading—selfishness? bravery? fear? hardness? patriotism? Are these characters suited to the one-act play? Use five adjectives to describe the kind of characters you think are best suited to one-act plays. How does the dramatist characterize his people—by what they say and do? or by what others say about them? Are the characters real? With which character do you sympathize? Are there any stock characters (a character which represents a type and is not particularly individualized)?

Notice the use of contrast in opposing characters, who act as foils to

each other. Write in a sentence or two the contrasting characteristics of two such characters. An important phase of character study, which has a direct bearing on the plot, is the influence of one character on another. Trace the influence of an important character from the beginning to the end. State specifically what he has caused other characters to do or not to do, and how his actions have influenced the outcome of the plot. Notice whether external circumstances, his own characteristics, or other characters influence him most. What is the function of the minor characters? Does a certain character act wisely, consistently? Would you have acted differently under the circumstances? Are you more interested in the characters or in the plot?

Visualization

It is impossible to enjoy or to understand a play until you train yourself to visualize the stage, and the appearance and action of the various characters. Try also to hear in your imagination their different voices. Draw a plan for the stage setting, marking the position of doors and furniture. Each one of you must have a definite picture of Hildegarde in *Grandma Pulls the String*, although in details each picture will necessarily differ.

This power of visualization in studying the drama is difficult for two reasons. In the first place, little or no preliminary description or discussion is given, such as is often found in the novel; the play plunges right into the midst of things. It is up to you to reconstruct from bits of conversation of the various characters what has happened before the beginning of the play. In the second place, as the play progresses, the author can give no explanations, as he can in the short story, in the essay, and in poetry. What the characters say and a few stage directions are all you have to go on.

Setting

How much does the setting give of background? of atmosphere? Is it realistic? romantic? Discuss the scenery of the ancient Greek play; of a play in Shakespeare's time. In some plays setting is more important than in others. In which plays in this collection does the setting seem a vital part of the drama?

Dialogue

The dialogue of a one-act play must necessarily be condensed, selective. Every word must help develop the plot. Is the dialogue real, true to life? Is it witty? commonplace?

Stage Business

The stage directions give to the reader of a play details of setting and characterization which would be evident to him if he saw the play on the stage, but they should do no more than this.

Read the stage directions of one of Shakespeare's plays. How do those of a modern one-act play differ? Do they aid in interpretation of character? of situation? Could some of the ideas given in the stage directions have been put in dialogue in the play? Which way would be more effective?

Dramatic Reading in Class

You will get much more out of a play, or part of a play, if it is acted before the class. All the preparation you need is to practice at home reading aloud your part. No rehearsals are necessary, and no stage properties. It is well, however, to have a definite stage plan, so that the various actors may at least enter and exit by the proper doors. Before you take a part sum up to yourself in a sentence or two the chief characteristics of the person you are to be, not forgetting to include the kind of voice and manners you are to have.

Customs and Ideals of Today

As most of the one-act plays you will read deal with the life of today, you will have an opportunity to observe and discuss present social customs and ideals. While you are studying the one-act play your oral-theme work may profitably be based on your reading. Give a three-minute talk on some ideal or custom of today which the play you are studying emphasizes. Are the ideals worthy of commendation? Should a play deal only with what is worthy? Have we advanced in customs? in ideals? Is the dramatist accurate in his picture of modern life? What details of life in other parts of the country or world do you get? Compare these customs and ideals with those of your own community.

Æsthetic Enjoyment

Read aloud in class certain passages which seem to you to have particular beauty of thought or language. Why do these passages appeal to you? Do the most beautiful passages contain the most noble thoughts? Notice the use of symbolism, of striking contrasts, of humor, of pathos. A play like *Bethlehem* is worthy of such study.

QUESTIONS ON INDIVIDUAL PLAYS

THE KELLY KID

1. What interests you most in this play—the characters, the situation, the dialogue? What one element does most to give the play "atmosphere"? 2. Do you side with the wrongdoer or with the law? Why? It is said that Shakespeare always makes the audience side with the right. What is the "right" in this play? What should be done with the Kelly Kid? 3. Is the situation one that might occur in real life? Is the dialogue natural? Are the characters real individuals, with their characteristics differentiated?

THE DWELLER IN THE DARKNESS

(For the Radio)

1. Do you think the radio is an effective medium for transmitting drama? Have you ever heard a drama over the radio? 2. Why is this play particularly good to give over the radio? Try writing a dialogue which would be suited to radio reproduction. 3. Is a person who listens to a drama over the radio in much the same position as the person who reads the drama? What is the difference? 4. How successful has the author been in revealing the characters without the aid of sight? When you see a play produced, how much do you depend on sight to help you form an opinion of the characters?

WANDERLUST

1. What are the two contending elements in Pollant? Why does he give in finally? 2. Do you sympathize at all with the point of view of the mother and the children? 3. Is the situation at all a common one in American family life? 4. Is the ending satisfying? Should the ending of a play be satisfying?

GRANDMA PULLS THE STRING

1. Are these characters real people or "stock characters"? 2. What is the motive underlying Grandma's actions? 3. In the case of Hildegarde and Grandma show how their speech is in keeping with their characters.

CABBAGES AND KINGS

1. In the introductory notes of this play (p. 95) it is stated that good things which are written for children give keen enjoyment to grown-ups. Give examples of this in longer plays, in other one-act plays, in opera, in prose, in verse. 2. Has the unity, an indispensable quality of a first-rate one-act play, been spoiled because of the dropping of the curtain or the change of scene in *Cabbages and Kings*? in *Bethlehem*? in *The Lean Years*? in *'Lijah*? In some plays a moment of darkness is the device used to indicate breaks of time and of action. Does this mar the unity in *Dawn*? in *Maurice's Own Idea*? in *The Closet*? Read (top of page xiii) what Professor Baker says about broken-up plays. Can any of the above-mentioned plays be more properly classified as "a series of scenes and a long play in miniature" than as a one-act? If so, which and why? 3. What is the origin of the title? (See The Walrus and the Carpenter in *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll.) 4. Aside from the fairy godmother, what is there about this story which characterizes it as a fairy story? 5. Why do you think the godmother's solution of the problem was a wise one?

A FOOL OF A MAN

1. Compare Horace with Pollant in *Wanderlust*. Why, in both plays, is it the man who cares nothing for social advancement? 2. How do the stage directions differ from the usual stage directions? 3. What is the theme of the play? Why did the author choose middle-aged people to bring out his theme?

DAWN

1. Is the last sentence in the play the only thing that gives you a clue to the real situation? 2. What is the theme of the play? Does the author convince you of the soundness of the idea he is trying to present? Are the Man and the Woman important elements in the development of this theme? 3. Does the wrong win? Should the right always win?

BETHLEHEM

This play, religious in subject and in feeling, is a reminder that practically all drama had its origin in religious worship. It suggests the miracle plays, before Shakespeare's day, performed by bands of roving actors. A story so sacred is suitable for this lofty and poetic treatment.

An organic element of the Greek drama was the chorus. It occupied a

rôle fluctuating between that of participants in and that of interpreters of the action. The Greek chorus was a company of people. A similar group was employed in early English plays on classical models. In Elizabethan drama this was reduced to a single character and, as Chorus in *Bethlehem*, was used to speak a prologue and epilogue and explain or comment on the course of events. Read a translation of a play by one of the classic authors (Gilbert Murray's translation of Sophocles' *Œdipus Tyrannus* is an interesting one to start with), and note how the chorus characterized the Greek drama. Do you recall other modern plays in which an interpreter, similar to Chorus in *Bethlehem*, speaks lines which are a commentary on what is said and done on the stage?

1. Does the fact that this play is written in verse detract from your enjoyment? What is the principal meter in which it is written? 2. What facts are given in this story which are not given in the Bible story? 3. What makes this play of interest in spite of the fact that there is no plot? 4. Read aloud to the class some of the most beautiful passages.

MAURICE'S OWN IDEA

1. What are the two elements which are struggling to gain possession of Maurice? 2. What characteristics common to dreams are found in this play? 3. What is there about this fantasy that appeals to you?

THE CRUMBS THAT FALL

1. Where did the author get the title for his play? 2. Did you think Golding took the pearl? 3. Why is this play called a comedy in the introductory notes on page 195? 4. Write a brief character sketch of Golding. 5. Is the story probable?

'LIJAH

1. When did you suspect the truth about 'Lijah? 2. Is the Judge wrong in deceiving his guests? 3. What effect does the hospitality of the Judge have on the two business men? 4. Make a list of the details of life on a plantation in the South given in this play.

MEREDEW'S RIGHT HAND

1. Is Jane in love with Meredew? Is Meredew in love with Jane? 2. Is the ending a surprise? 3. What characteristic of Jane's has endeared her to Meredew? 4. Does the fact that the characters and situation are exaggerated detract from the play?

TRIFLES

1. Write briefly the story of the Wrights before the play begins. 2. Write a brief character description of Mrs. Wright. Because of the dramatist's skill you are able to do this, although Mrs. Wright never appears on the stage. 3. Comment on the relative importance of what the Sheriff and the Attorney discover and what the women discover.

PEGGY

1. Is Harriette a lady? Is Peggy? What is a "lady"? 2. What traits in Peggy's character make Dan love her? What traits make the audience side with her? 3. Is this play a tragedy? 4. Discuss the importance of the setting in this play.

UNCLE JIMMY

1. What influence did Friendship Village have on Uncle Jimmy? on Grandma? What effect would it have on you? 2. Make a list of colloquial expressions and of village customs. 3. Do you think the ending is happy or pathetic?

THE CLOSET

1. What interests you chiefly in this play, the plot or the characters? 2. Are you satisfied with the ending of the story? 3. By means of a "flash-back," or "cut-back" as they say in the movies, we are given a picture of Rachel in her younger days. Compare the use of this device here and in *The Lean Years.* Write a comparison of Rachel then and now.

THE KILLER

1. Why does The Killer let the Sheriff think he is the man the Sheriff is after? 2. Does the plot seem probable? Do the characters seem real? 3. After you have finished reading the play go back and see what hints The Killer throws out that all is not as it seems.

THE LEAN YEARS

1. In what way are the young people like their parents? In what way do they differ? 2. In which of the four scenes do you think Mr. and Mrs. Carson were most happy? 3. Sum up in one sentence the conflict in this play. 4. Why might this be called an episodic play?

PIERROT BEFORE THE SEVEN DOORS

1. The title mentions "seven" doors. Only six doors are indicated on the stage. Is the seventh, an invisible, door made sufficiently clear to justify the title when the Young Man says to Pierrot, toward the end of the play, p. 388, "The everlasting door is open before you, revealing an endless vista"? 2. Sum up in one sentence the philosophy of each of the six people who try to help Pierrot. 3. In the introductory note to the play, p. 373, you are told that this play suggests a morality play. How does it? 4. Are the characters stock characters or real individuals? 5. Use five adjectives to describe the charm of this play.

DAGGERS AND DIAMONDS

1. Is the dramatist fair to the radicals? Does she mean to be? Does she make Sophie appear too ridiculous? 2. Which interests you more, the plot or the characters? Why? 3. What single element running throughout the play gives the play its atmosphere?

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